

Birla Central Library

PILANI (Rajasthan)

Class No. *915-3*.....

Book No. *P. 532 P*.....

Accession No. *600.33*...

*This book has been
graciously presented by*

Seth G. D. Birla

A PILGRIM IN ARABIA

By the same Author:

THE HEART OF ARABIA (2 vols.) Constable
1922

DAS GEHEIMNISVOLLE ARABIEN (2 vols.)
Brockhaus, Leipzig, 1925 (German translation of the above)

ARABIA OF THE WAHHABIS, Constable,
1928

ARABIA (*Modern World Series*) Benn, 1930

THE EMPTY QUARTER, Constable, 1933

HARUN AL RASHID, Peter Davies, 1933

HARUN AL RASHID (*American Edition*,
Appleton, N.Y., 1934)

SHEBA'S DAUGHTERS, Methuen, 1939

A PILGRIM IN ARABIA (*limited edition*)
Golden Cockerel Press, 1945

Awaiting publication:

ARABIAN HIGHLANDS (2 vols.)

THE BACKGROUND OF ISLAM



Hyss Tilley

A PILGRIM IN ARABIA

H. STJ. B. PHILBY

ROBERT HALE LIMITED
18 Bedford Square London W.C.1
1946

DEDICATION

To my friend

SIR GRANVILLE BANTOCK

Behold yon sterile spot,
Where now the wandering Arab's tent
Flaps in the desert blast
Shelley

*First published in March 1943, by the Golden Cockerel Press
in an edition de luxe*

CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	6
INTRODUCTION	7
THE MECCAN PILGRIMAGE	15
“THE CITY ILLUMINED”—MADINA	50
THE QUEEN OF THE DESERT—RIYADH	93
QARNAIT—THE CORONET	123
A PERSIAN HOLIDAY	152

ILLUSTRATIONS

The Author

Frontispiece

Between pages 96 and 97

GROUP 1 *The King with Sir Percy Cox at
Uqair in 1920*

*The Crown Prince (Amir Sa'ud)
with his uncle and nephew*

*The King's Ministers of State: from
left to right: Khalid al Hakim,
Rushdi Mullhis, Dr Mahmud
Hamuda, Yusuf Yasin, Khalid al
Hud, 'Abdul Wahhab al Naib*

*The Amir Faisal, Viceroy of
Mecca, second son of the King
An open-air conference in a Hijaz
village*

*Officials of the Sa'udi Arabian
Government*

The King at prayer

The King with his younger children

The King performing a war-dance

GROUP 2 *Three generations of a Quraish
family in the Taif highlands
Sulubi woman at the desert wells of
Duwaid*

*The late Hajji 'Abdullah 'Ali
Ridha, governor of Jidda under
three kings, with his youngest son
and daughter*

The Customs House at Jidda

Children of Jidda

The author at Taif

The author's wife in Arab robes

Illustrations

- GROUP 2 *The author's house at Jidda: Eve's
[cont.] tomb in background to left*
*Interior of author's house at Jidda:
 open pillared court on first floor*
General view of Jidda
Jidda from the air
Bait Baghdadi: a mansion of Jidda
A street in Jidda
Typical house architecture at Jidda
*Parade of cavalry and camelry in
 front of the barracks at Jidda*
Parade of Sa'udi infantry at Jidda
*Caravan leaving Jidda with pil-
 grims in camel-litters*
- GROUP 3 *The boundary pillars of the sacred
 territory at Mecca*
The Great Mosque of Mecca
The royal palace in Mecca
*The King's palace at Muna during
 the pilgrimage*
The pilgrim camp at Muna
*The pilgrims arrive on the plain of
 'Arafat*
*The Mount of Mercy, 'Arafat dur-
 ing the pilgrimage*
*The effigy of Satan and the Shrine
 of the Ram at Muna*
*Sheep descending from the moun-
 tains for the Day of Sacrifice*
- GROUP 4 *Terminus of the Hijaz Railway at
 Madina*
*Street leading from Madina station
 towards the mosque*
*Manakha, the pilgrim camping-
 ground in Madina*
*Qasr Sa'idi, the principal fort of
 Madina*

Illustrations

- GROUP 4 *A street in Madina*
[cont.] *The Prophet's shrine in the Great Mosque of Madina*
Street leading to the Great Mosque
The Great Mosque of Madina
A guard-post on the road from Madina to Quba
The mosque at Quba
The old city-wall of Madina
Ruins of an ancient Jewish synagogue in Madina oasis
General view of Madina: looking west
The gold-mine of Mahd al Dhahab between Madina and Mecca
The fort and petrol-station of Duwadami on the motor-road from Mecca to Riyadh
The well of Mahdatha in the desert east of Mecca
- GROUP 5 *Horses of the royal stud in Kharj, south of Riyadh*
Artesian lake of Mukhisa in Kharj
Artesian pool of 'Ain Samha in Kharj
Cars bogged in flooded desert near Riyadh
A river in the desert after heavy rain
The city of Riyadh
A palm-garden in the Riyadh oasis
The King's summer-palace in the Batin near Riyadh
Palace of the King's eldest brother in the oasis of Riyadh
A draw-well in the Riyadh palm-groves

Illustrations

- GROUP 5 *The royal cemetery at Riyadh*
 [cont.] *The cathedral-mosque in Riyadh*
 Another mosque at Riyadh
- GROUP 6 *Friday prayers at the Great Mos-*
 que at Taïf
 The town of Taïf
 The King's palace at Taïf
 The aerodrome at Taïf
 The fort of Taïf
 Stacking juniper scantlings in the
 Taïf highlands for the Mecca
 market
 A highland village near Taïf
 The Taïf torrent (Wadi Wijh) in
 spate
 The mountain of Qarnait (8,000
 feet) near Taïf
 The actual summit of Qarnait
 The Hijaz mountains, as seen from
 Qarnait
 A mountain village (Nikhib) near
 Taïf
 The highlands of Taïf, with Qar-
 nait in central background
 The village of Dulaim on the Kara
 plateau
 The Hijaz mountain barrier as
 seen from the lowlands
 Buttresses of the Hijaz mountains
 Approaching summit of Kara pass
 between Mecca and Taïf
 Paved way at the summit of Kara
 pass
 Mount Damavand (over 18,000
 feet above the sea) in Northern
 Persia

PREFACE

IN selecting the essays which make up this volume from a vast mass of unpublished material accumulated during the quarter century of my sojourn in the Middle East, I have deliberately confined myself to what may be regarded as “ancient history,” whose aftermath is obviously of great interest and importance to us all to-day. Except in rare cases and, as it were, in parenthesis, I have not projected myself into what was the future when these essays were written to take their part some day as chapters in a comprehensive record of my experiences in Arabia. Apart from necessary revision and pruning, I have left these chapters substantially as they were written under the influence of fresh impressions. And in that shape I hope they will be acceptable to the public as snapshots taken years ago, as it were, on a holiday jaunt, and laid aside in an album to remind me of the “days of yore and times long gone before.”

The Persian story is the picture of the moment preceding the birth of a new regime which has since fallen untimely by the wayside. The Arabian chapters all relate to a year of woe—the period of the world-wide economic depression of the early 'thirties—and contain, albeit only incidentally, a description of the growing-pains of a then new dispensation which has since made good in the most triumphant fashion. For the rest there is much in this volume which should obviate some of the graver errors to which writers and broadcasters on matters Arabian seem to be particularly prone. In that hope I confront my readers, with gratitude to all who have helped in the preparation of this little work.

H. StJ. B. PHILBY

Coed-y-Bleiddiau
Tan-y-Bwlch
N. Wales

INTRODUCTION

ARABIA, situated as she is at the very cross-roads of human destiny—halfway between north and south, east and west of the inhabited world—has ever watched with interest and detachment the unrolling comedy of human conflict. The “Sealand” of the ancient Babylonians, she became and still remains the “Island” of the Arabs—a desert island. Her ancient, unspoiled tongue has taken root in many lands to give us our Cornish *Tor* and Welsh *Aber*. The *Ides* of Rome recall the pagan *'Id*, which now stands for the holy days and festivals of *Islam*. The very name of Europe echoes the *'Aruba* of the Arabs, and the Greeks took their *ἐρῆμος* from Arabia's *'Arima*. Even far-off Brazil commemorates the *Barazin* or fortresses of Cortes. And so on.

Famous from of old for her hospitality, it was Arabia that opened her arms to the refugees of the Flood and the Exodus, and more recently though less graciously to those of Europe. It was she that mothered the three great religions of the One God and nursed them until they could go forth to conquer the world. The first two she nourished in pagan tolerance, but the last-born she took to her bosom with all a mother's passion. Twice she has been a Great Power of the world—in the days of Sheba and in the age of the Califs. She has seen all the Empires wax and wane—the Hittites and the Assyrians, Babylonia and Persia, Egypt and Greece and Rome: and her own, that foundered in the chaos which fashioned the greatest of them all, now locked in mortal combat with the dragon. She saw the birth of Israel in the travail of Pharaoh's Egypt. She saw the decadence of Augustan Rome yield to the new spirit of Christianity. She saw the Empire of Constantine challenged in its decay by the rival Empire of Persia and both collapse in ruins under the scorching breath of her own new inspiration from Mecca. It was the last of her Prophets that bequeathed to the world a picture of that disaster in a famous passage of the *Quran*: “The Romans have been defeated in the nearby

Introduction

parts of the earth, but after their defeat they shall yet defeat their enemies in a few years' time—for to God is the ordering heretofore and hereafter. And in that time the Faithful shall rejoice in victory, for God giveth victory to whom He wills, and He is the mighty, the merciful." And so indeed it was. Between A.D. 608 and 619 Rome lost all her far-eastern provinces, and it is on record that the astonished people of those countries viewed these events with complete indifference—Rome had lost her hold on their affection and respect. The Emperor Heraclius was not ready for his counter-attack till 623, but by 630 he had restored the Roman Empire to its original frontiers. Then came the miracle foretold in the passage I have quoted. In A.D. 642, ten years after the death of Muhammad, the faithful did indeed have reason to rejoice in victory, and the virile Empire of the Arabs under the banner of Islam rose upon the ruins of Rome and Persia. It lasted for centuries, ageing into decrepitude and decadence until it fell under the hammer-strokes of the conquering Turk.

This brief glimpse into the past is not without significance to-day, when once more the inhabited world is divided into warring camps and locked in a struggle for dominion or existence. As ever before, the Arabs are interested spectators of the drama. Their interest is enlivened by the comparatively recent rebirth of their own national consciousness, not unaccompanied by ambitions encouraged by their past achievements. But Arabia has lagged far behind the march of modern material progress; and her effort to play a minor part on the stage of the Great War, misguided by an ill-starred dynasty of the noblest birth, brought her nothing but frustration and disappointment. Without modern armaments the Arabs were helpless, and the policy of the victorious Great Powers during the generation that followed that struggle succeeded, in spite of sporadic rebellions, in dividing the Arab world into a score of petty States most of which remained under the direct or indirect control of European Powers, which also established their sway over the Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa, so proud of their Arabic and Islamic culture, from Morocco to the Sudan. It is idle to pretend that the Arabs like or ever liked

Introduction

this domination of the West over their countries, of which only two have succeeded in maintaining their complete and effective independence. These are the Yaman (not infrequently in conflict with the British authorities in Aden) and Sa'udi Arabia, which has absorbed the Hijaz and the former principalities of Ha'il and 'Asir and which has prospered under the wise and vigorous guidance of one who will surely be acclaimed by history as the greatest man produced by Arabia since the Prophet Muhammad himself. King 'Abdul 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud ascended the throne of his fathers forty-two years ago as a contemporary of our own Queen Victoria—surely one of the very few actually reigning monarchs of to-day who can claim that distinction. Fortunately for him, for his people and for us, the cordiality of his relations with Great Britain has never been open to doubt in spite of the occasional breezes that have breathed roughly on the surface of our mutual diplomacy. A succession of Englishmen, *quorum pars parva fui*, has during these four decades fostered that friendship in profound admiration of the man and, with some minor exceptions perhaps, has encouraged the sturdy independence, which has at times been the despair of some of our Government Departments and most of our pro-consuls in the Middle East. Yet it is that very independence of his that stands us in good stead to-day. Had we had in Malaya or Burma—nay, even in India—a leader of his calibre in our confidence, we had scarce been left so “naked to our enemies.” But let us make no mistake about it. The Arabs are not happy about our policy and its implications. Nor is King Ibn Sa'ud; nor the King of Yaman; nor are Egypt, Syria and 'Iraq, to say nothing of Palestine and Trans-Jordan which we actually rule in virtue of our mandate; nor are the lesser States of the Arabian littoral. One and all, they demand complete independence for all the Arab peoples—a demand fully consonant with the principles of the Atlantic Charter. At that price we could have had the full co-operation of all the Arabs as allies from the first moment of this war. But the price did not then seem to our Government worth paying for a questionable advantage. Now that it is too late, we may regret our reluctance to look ahead; and it is not far wrong to say

Introduction

that the only country of the Middle East which has never given us a moment's trouble or anxiety during this war is Sa'udi Arabia, whose complete independence we have respected, however grudgingly at times. We have had to fight 'Iraq and Persia; we have had to do some hard bargaining with Turkey; we have had to intern Syrian nationalists to keep them out of mischief; we have had to walk delicately with Egypt; and in the lesser Arab States we have had to keep troops to ensure their good behaviour. Only Ibn Sa'ud stands out as a loyal friend to us in our hour of need.

Yet Ibn Sa'ud is not to be reckoned among our allies. He is *de facto* neutral, however benevolent towards us, while *de jure*, in his inscrutable wisdom, he simply ignores the state of war which surrounds his country on every side. The King of the Yaman on the other hand has long since formally proclaimed his neutrality. When the Italians lost their sovereignty in their provinces across the Red Sea, King Ibn Sa'ud asked their diplomats and other residents at Jidda to leave his country under safe conduct for Italy. On the other hand he maintains diplomatic relations with Vichy, where he is represented by a Minister¹ while Marshal Petain's Government is similarly represented at Jidda; a Free French representative was also permitted to visit Jidda during the most recent pilgrimage to look after the interests of the Syrian pilgrims. Without abating a jot or tittle of his long friendship with Britain Ibn Sa'ud steers skilfully among the rocks of the diplomatic ocean.

His sole aim is to safeguard the interests of Islam and the Arabs. And no one will deny that for a generation the country which he rules has enjoyed the blessings of peace in a measure unparalleled in the history of his people and scarcely to be matched elsewhere in the troubled world of our time. With peace his country has enjoyed progress and prosperity. The annual pilgrimage to Mecca has, as tens of thousands of pilgrims will testify, been made safer and more comfortable than ever before. With the co-operation of foreign industrial elements the deserts of Arabia have been made to yield up their

¹ Recently transferred to Geneva

Introduction

hidden treasures—principally oil and gold—under arrangements ensuring that the benefits of such exploitation shall be devoted primarily to the advancement of Arabian prosperity. They have, in fact, contributed substantially to the improvement of communications in a vast, thinly peopled country with all that that means in the way of greater administrative efficiency. The motor-car and even the aeroplane, the wireless telegraph and the radio, electric-lighting and agricultural machinery: these are among the amenities of western civilization that have become familiar enough in what was once a land of danger and romance. If the cinema and the cabaret, the casino and other refinements of the West have not been admitted into Sa'udi Arabia, it may be that Ibn Sa'ud is wise in his generation. The "Days of the Arabs" differ little today from those of other folk, but Arabian nights preserve their pristine peace and calm. We should not wish it otherwise.

All this is the work of Ibn Sa'ud—an autocrat in a democratic setting, for Arabia is the most democratic of all countries. The Arab is an individualist in the highest degree; and in his lands the trinity of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" is worshipped more fervently than ever it was in France. But therein lies the danger. No man can rule effectively in Arabia except as the interpreter and executor of the people's will. It is very important that the peoples of the West should understand what that is. So far as third parties are concerned, all the Arabs of all Arab countries want freedom and independence and, if we are sincere in our war-time encouragement of all "freedom-loving countries," we cannot cavil at that. Complete independence was indeed promised to the whole Arab world by Great Britain on behalf of all the Allied Nations of the Great War as long ago as in 1915, but that promise has never been fulfilled. Most of the Arab countries are still under effective European control in one shape or another. Naturally the Arabs hope that the present war will result in the realization of their national aspirations for freedom. Axis propaganda plays on the note of "India for the Indians," "Egypt for the Egyptians," "Arabia for the Arabs." The sincerity of such propaganda may

Introduction

be questioned, but it is not without effect. It concedes in principle the demand of the Arabs, while British and American propaganda, perhaps mindful of the promises of the Great War, remains silent to the detriment of Allied interests. Let us then understand the Arab position.

First, no one with any knowledge of the subject, will deny that since the Great War and up to the present moment Arab opinion has been uniformly hostile to the imperial pretensions of France and Italy. Secondly, as our experience has shown, there have during the same period been and still remain many points of conflict between British policy and Arab aspirations, which could be easily resolved in President Roosevelt's formula of the "Four Freedoms" if we have the will to settle them. Thirdly, and this is very important, it so happens that there never has been any issue whatever in controversy between Arabia on the one hand and Germany and Japan on the other—except the fear that these countries might, if the opportunity arose, aspire to displace Britain in domination over the Arab world. And last, though by no means least, the Government of the United States of America has an absolutely clean record, as regards both the past and the future, and many Arabs remember with gratitude and hopefulness the gallant struggle of President Wilson to secure the independence of Syria.

To sum up—there may be small elements among the Arabs which may be regarded as pro-British or partial to totalitarian principles, which after all originated in the Ataturk before ever they were preached by Mussolini or Hitler or Franco. Ten per cent each would be a generous allowance to cover all those of this way of thinking or that. There remains a solid core of Arab sentiment, 80 per cent of the people, which is primarily "freedom-loving" and, in consequence, "anti-European," in the sense that the Arabs resent the tendency of the Christian West to claim and, by its greater military might, achieve control over the Islamic lands of the Middle East. Among the Arabs there is no endemic antipathy towards the peoples of Europe, least of all to the British; but they do demand for themselves the right to live their own lives in their

Introduction

own way with freedom from fear, freedom of worship and freedom of speech. As for freedom from want they pray for that to a greater power than the Great Powers. In this prayer and in that demand they are led by their natural *Imam*, His Majesty King 'Abdul 'Aziz ibn Sa'ud.

THE MECCAN PILGRIMAGE

I. PREPARATIONS

BY the end of the third week in April, 1931, the last batch of pilgrim ships—from Egypt and the Sudan, from Morocco and Syria, from India and the Far East—had arrived in Jidda, and a disappointingly meagre concourse of some 40,000 visitors from overseas had gathered at Mecca, to be swelled during the few remaining days by perhaps twice that number of pilgrims from Najd and the Yaman and of local *Hijazis*.

The number of pilgrims from abroad during the preceding five years had varied between 80,000 and 120,000; and the drop in 1931 was mainly due to the world-wide economic depression which marked that and subsequent years. In 1932 the number fell further to 30,000 and in the following year to only 20,000. This represented the trough of the depression, for in 1934 the attendance from abroad rose to 25,370 and since then there had been a slow but steady improvement until the present war set back the clock once more. For the decade preceding the war the average number of foreign pilgrims visiting Mecca each year may have been about 35,000. Before this period the influx of pilgrims from Malaya and the Dutch East Indies alone frequently exceeded 50,000 souls in a year; and it was particularly this element which dwindled to meagre proportions owing to the subsequent slump in the prices of the commodities they produce—sugar and rubber in particular.

The new moon of 19th April had not been seen in the Hijaz, and news of its actual sighting that evening was anxiously awaited from the newcomers from far afield in desert and mountain. The actual day of the central ceremony of the pilgrimage—the standing by Jabal al Rahma in the vast plain of 'Arafat on the ninth day of the lunar month of Dhil Hijja—could not be fixed in the absence of such information; and it

The Meccan Pilgrimage

was not till Thursday, 23rd April, the fifth day of the month, that the prevailing uncertainty was relieved by the production before, and certification by, the ecclesiastical authorities of the necessary evidence. The moon had indeed been seen on the evening preceding 19th April and the ninth day of Dhil Hijja would thus fall on Monday, the 27th. Plans could now be made for the great exodus to Muna and 'Arafat, and those who would be early on the scene—to make holiday under the stars until the great “standing”—began moving out from Mecca after the Friday prayers of the 24th.

That same evening the actual pilgrimage celebrations began with the customary royal banquet at the palace, to which between 600 and 700 guests had been bidden including Amanullah Khan, ex-king of the Afghans, Prince Ahmad Saif al Din, grandson of Sultan 'Abdul 'Aziz of the house of Osman, the Afghan Minister at Cairo and other representatives of the reigning Afghan King Nadir Khan, Sir A. K. Ghaznavi, of the Bengal Executive Council, and others too numerous to mention, representatives of practically every country and community professing the faith of Islam.

Dinner having been disposed of with the customary expedition of the East, the huge assembly gathered in the spacious audience chamber of the palace to be entertained with the recitation of poems suitable to the occasion by their composers—poets of Arabia and Egypt. Speeches followed the poems—in Arabic and Urdu, and even one in English by Sir A. K. Ghaznavi, who seemed to be sublimely unconscious of the incongruity alike of the European parliamentary manner and the speech of the infidel in the Cradle of Islam on the eve of the most solemn anniversary of the faith. And then spoke the King, whom incidentally one of the Urdu orators had addressed as *Amir al Muminin*, the historic title of the Califs of Islam.

In all Arabia, a land not deficient in eloquence, there is no more practised speaker, none more modest and unassuming in the manner or more weighty and effective in the matter of his discourses. For over thirty years of ever-growing responsibility for the welfare of an expanding realm he has always been conscious of the *cathedra* created by his unique position. Speaking

Preparations

always extempore in the full-blooded tongue of his native desert and modestly disclaiming any proficiency in the language of the schools: speaking always from his seat, as do the Arabs, without oratorical tricks and almost without gesture: he dominates his audience with a gradual crescendo of reasoned statement based always on an appeal to historic authorities as familiar to his hearers as to himself and beyond challenge. And above all, when confronted as on this occasion with an audience of varied experience and accustomed to frequent contact with the non-Islamic world and its material civilization, he knows better than anyone how to raise his discourse above the plane of a purely worldly standpoint into a sphere where the common heritage of Islam comes into play with the decisive effect of drama. *Imam* of the Muslim congregation at its only annual mass meeting to celebrate the solemn festival of the *Hajj*, he must give his hearers something solid to ponder on before they go their various ways to be absorbed once more into the vortex of the great world whence they have come, while he remains at his post ever mindful of the task that is his for the common weal. For him there is no relaxation in the service of God, as ordained by the Prophet whose successor he is in all but name.

“My brothers! think not that we have anything to fear from the infidel, whom God in his inscrutable wisdom has been pleased to place in authority over many lands of Islam. That is assuredly for our trial. Indeed it is not them that I fear, but rather the divisions, the political and sectarian divisions, of Islam itself. We are divided and, until we find unity in our great faith, we cannot triumph. That is my message to you, my brothers in the faith from all the world over. Let us only be in harmony, and no force in the world can triumph over us.

“And what is our faith? Islam is after all not the religion of Ibn Sa’ud, nor the religion of the Sharif, nor the religion of this sect or that. It is God’s religion that we all in common profess, as proclaimed by his Prophet (on whom be salutation and blessings) and practised by his orthodox followers of old. In that we all agree and, by God’s gracious aid, that is the only religion that shall be practised in this holy territory so long as

The Meccan Pilgrimage

I am its ruler. For the doctrines of all the jarring sects I care naught and I ask of you all, you leaders of the various communities of Islam, to join with me in the upholding of the one true faith which we all profess.

“As for my own position, of a truth whosoever is for the true faith will find me ready to be his humblest servant and helper, but whoso be against it or act to its hurt will find me the foremost of his enemies. My present position I have not sought, but never will I relinquish it except to one who can serve better than myself a faith for which I would sacrifice myself, my sons, my family and my all—yea, if it were in conflict with six hundred thousand tens of thousands of infidels.

“It is not indeed the infidel but ourselves and our lack of unity that we must blame for our present lowly position. After all, in the matter of material civilization, cannot we too do all that they have done if we work with the same will and energy? Does our religion forbid us to set up factories, to seek in the earth for its mineral resources, to gather wealth and knowledge and skill? Assuredly not, and so far as in me lies I shall promote the material advance of this my country, the country of the Arabs, the birthplace of Islam.

“But, to succeed, Islam must unite and cease from the factions and divisions which retard its progress and make its people an easy prey for the enemy. But we cannot advance in that direction while we find professed leaders of Islam, like Shaukat 'Ali, for instance, following the lead of the infidel in talking, as he is reported by the newspapers to have done recently in Palestine, of “our brothers the Jews!” Our brothers the Jews! no, not that, never that, no, nor the Christians either. To talk like that is an offence against God himself, with which I can have no truck. Leave the infidel alone in his error and judge between them justly if they be under our rule, but to admit brotherhood with them, no! that I will not tolerate. No, certainly not, and God forbid!

“It is not by such pandering to western ways that we can gain equality with the west. Let us be proud of our faith, of the traditions of the Arab race which spread Islam over the world, of our Islamic code and civilization. Let us stand true

Preparations

to all that, while developing the arts and crafts by which Europe and the west have forged ahead of us. Then and only then will God help us to win equality with the rest of the world. "For verily God changeth not that which is in a people until they change that which is in themselves."

Such, in very brief summary, was the King's discourse to his guests on the eve of the pilgrimage, simple enough in its outline, direct enough in its appeal, even as the speech of the Prophet himself and the Califs of old. The next day saw the exodus of white-clad, bare-headed pilgrims to 'Arafat in full swing.

It should be explained here that all persons performing the pilgrimage or entering the Meccan territory after any considerable period of absence therefrom are required to discard their ordinary clothing and to don the *Ihram*. This consists of two seamless (generally white) sheets or towels wrapped respectively round the loins and the upper part of the body. Shoes or sandals may be worn, but the head must be uncovered though an umbrella or sunshade may be carried if desired. The *Ihram* garment for women tends to vary according to nationality, but in principle it is a single-piece overall concealing the whole person and any underclothing she may wear—on this there is no restriction in practice—from head to foot. The only apertures in this covering are the eye-holes, which are often fitted with thin veiling or network. The *Ihram*, once donned for the pilgrimage, may not be discarded until all the prescribed ceremonies have been completed, as will be shown in due course.

The long broad street that leads from the Great Mosque through the city eastward past the historic cemetery of Al Ma'la and the royal palace in Ma'abida was all day long a scene of unceasing and ever-increasing activity as the long trains of litter-bearing camels, often four or five lines abreast, got under weigh, moving slowly but steadily to their destination some nine or ten miles distant. Between the files of those travelling in this manner small bands of pilgrims on donkeys threaded their way at a somewhat faster pace in and out of the motley rout. And yet the broad fairway had room enough for

The Meccan Pilgrimage

the legions that went on foot, old and young, men, women and children, generally in companies sporting multi-coloured banners to serve as rallying points for the various groups both on the road and ultimately on the plain of 'Arafat, now rapidly becoming a city of tents. These banners and the sun-covers of the litters added a touch of gay colour to the otherwise white and brown mass of bodies and pilgrim robes that passed seemingly without end along the road. Here and there a valiant group of new arrivals from the East, intent on performing the ceremonies connected with first entry into Mecca, stemmed the eastward stream with such speed as they could make in the circumstances to reach the *Haram*, as the Great Mosque of Mecca is called. And every now and then a privileged motor-car with a pass signed by the King's own hand—for all motor traffic in the city had been suspended by order for the two days of the main exodus—snorted or purred in the throng, carefully feeling its way eastward or westward according to the errand of its occupants. As the day advanced towards evening the throng of camels, donkeys, pedestrians became ever more thick, and the shades of night fell upon a city still pouring forth its denizens in an endless stream.

II. THE EXODUS TO 'ARAFAT

THE flood continued with undiminished volume the next day, the traditional date for the exodus and known as *Yaum al Tarwiya*. Only the King and his entourage sat still, going about their normal work till the hour fixed for their departure in the early afternoon. "It is like a campaign," said the King, "this pilgrimage business." And so it was for him. From every part of the now extended theatre of activities reports of progress and events were brought to him for his orders or attention. Perhaps a motor-car trying to evade the restrictions on movement in force within the city or on the road to 'Arafat, or now a car capsized by some chauffeur's folly and needing succour for its damaged passengers; or again some member of the royal family or high official requiring transport, and so on.

The Exodus to 'Arafat

No matter was too small for the King's personal attention, which was throughout concentrated on the determination to make everything as successful as conditions would allow. And all the time he never moved from his place at headquarters which had been temporarily connected up by telephone with Muna, three miles distant, the advanced base whither the royal family had already gone overnight by car to be accommodated in a large but simple palace constructed during the preceding two months or, rather, greatly extended in comparison with the humble building of the earlier years.

I was to ride with the King but, owing to a last-minute hitch and the consequent late arrival of my riding-camel, I actually made the journey to Muna by motor-car with the Minister of Finance, and thus had an opportunity of seeing the new route prescribed for all motor vehicles in order to leave the main road free for camels and pedestrians. The *Najdi* camel still appears to have a rooted objection to the noisy lumbering motor-car, though his *Hijazi* brother has long reconciled himself to the latter's intrusion and competition.

The motor-track follows the valley to the south of Muna which carries the splendid masonry aqueduct of Queen Zubaida at a high level along the flank of the low hills on the left hand as we went up. A car or two we found embedded in the occasional ugly patches of sand to be negotiated on this route; and another vehicle had apparently overturned owing to its too great speed over rocks hidden in the deep sand. Its more or less injured occupants were couched in its shade awaiting relief. Otherwise we reached Muna without incident after doubling back from the end of the spur dividing the two roads. The King was alone at the moment in the great newly built reception chamber adjoining the Muna palace, the camels of his bodyguard being couched around, while the various members of the royal family occupied the blocks of tents placed at their disposal.

Muna, a deserted and derelict village for 350 days of each lunar year, had suddenly come to life. Every one of its not numerous houses was fully occupied by pilgrims paying exorbitant rents—often as high as £30 or £40 for the few days

The Meccan Pilgrimage

of the festival. Its vast valley between low black hills had blossomed into a city of tents, and its single road, passing through the village and the middle of the valley, was thronged with pedestrians and caravans going through to 'Arafat, where many pilgrims prefer to spend the night in contrast to those of the *Hanbali* persuasion, for the most part people from Najd, who, following as always the actual practice of the Prophet, spend the first night at Muna for the afternoon, sunset and evening prayers of that day and do not move forward till after the sun has risen, a spear's length above the horizon, the following morning.

Dinner was served for the royal party in a huge tent near the palace and after the meal I strolled through the camp and village—no easy matter in the ever-moving throng of camels and people. The moon lent enchantment to the scene, and I noticed that the three “devils” set up at intervals in the village—each a low masonry pillar within a circular masonry wall of modest dimensions—had been newly whitewashed against their customary lapidation during the holidays following the pilgrimage. The petty shopkeepers of Muna seemed to be doing a brisk business in the unconsidered trifles that pilgrims must have on such an occasion—souvenirs, foodstuffs and water.

I had my bed laid out near the main road on the edge of the great platform adjoining the palace and, as I dozed off to sleep under the stars with no covering but my pilgrim garments, the ghostly train passed by unceasingly on the way to 'Arafat. The air buzzed all night with the querulous murmuring—half bray and half bleat—of camels and the fussy grinding of cars. No less than 300 motor vehicles composed the fleet destined to take the royal family to its destination—its women and slaves and children even down to the less than year old Talal, the baby of the King's fifty-odd children.

On such occasions in the East there is no such thing as recognized hours of sleep. Many indeed slept, including myself, but our slumbers did not diminish the din, to which I awoke again about 3 a.m. for the dawn prayer in the great reception-room. It would still be long before sunrise and the King, according to his wont, having slept but little was en-

The Exodus to 'Arafat

grossed in his sacred readings, while we sat round drinking coffee and tea.

It is related of the Prophet that he was always partial to three indulgences—women, scents and food—and that he had experience, and to spare, of the first two with but slender opportunities for the last. The present wearer of his mantle in Arabia admits to full experience and knowledge of women and sweet perfumes, but to food and sleep he is a stranger. His frugality in the former is the terror of his guests who have to eat avidly to rise contentedly when he quits the table; while of sleep it may be said that Ibn Sa'ud knows nothing of its delights. In this respect he rations himself to a minimum, which has become second nature, but scarcely gives him the repose necessary to a never idle brain.

As the light of day began to intrude upon the dust-haze of the valley from behind the black hills there was a stirring among the camels at the palace door. In another moment we were all in the saddle and, as the King's party moved down the valley, converging trains soon swelled the cavalcade to magnificent proportions. Not less than 10,000 camels rode behind the King that morning, the morning of the *Hajj*, and noiselessly enough though roughly the cavalcade swept down the valley like an untamed flood, as the sun rose slowly but surely and at length peeped down over the crest of the black hills on to a haze of hanging dust. On past the solitary minaret of Muzdalifa we swept and through the narrow valley of the Mazumain to the Bazan water-tanks, where the Zubaida aqueduct swings across the road. And then we came to the two pillars marking the boundary of the sacred territory of Mecca. Beyond it lies the secular or neutral ground of Wadi 'Arna, in which is the mosque of Namira, a vast whitened enclosure with crenellated walls but without a minaret. Here in the neutral area, whose further border towards the plain of 'Arafat is marked with other boundary pillars, we drew rein to halt according to the Prophet's practice till the early afternoon. Tents had been put up in advance and we were soon tackling a frugal though not unwelcome breakfast, after which repose and, if possible, sleep were the order of the day. Not far ahead

The Meccan Pilgrimage

Jabal al Rahma, the Mount of Mercy, which is the central feature of the 'Arafat plain, stood out conspicuous with the whitened pillar on its summit over a canopy of dust-haze marking the invisible tent-city which had sprung up overnight for the accommodation of the pilgrims. All around us was the sand valley of 'Arna with scattered tents, while vast crowds of pilgrims, mostly African blacks from far afield, centred on the Namira mosque and its bounteous wells. The day warmed to its work, exuding heat in the forenoon only to dissipate it in due course with gentle breezes which struck delightfully cool on our scantily clad bodies grouped in the grateful shade of tents. Water was plentiful and even ice was in evidence from the royal palace.

For a brief space the King slept and soon after noon we were summoned to his tent for the midday meal of mutton and rice and other simple things, after which we walked across the stretch of sand, now like fire to the bare feet and necessitating the use of sandals, to the Namira mosque, where the vast assembly of waiting worshippers made access to our places before the pulpit and *Mihrab* not a little difficult.

This midday service in the mosque of Namira in the secular strip of valley dividing the sacred territories of Mecca and 'Arafat is a ceremony of great importance to those who would follow in detail the actual practice of Muhammad on the occasion of the only pilgrimage which he ever attended a few months before his death. The courtyard of the mosque with the narrow-roofed portico along its Mecca-ward side provides ample space for an enormous congregation, but each year the same trouble occurs. Vast masses of pilgrims take up their positions in the mosque itself from a very early hour of the day of pilgrimage and many of them even spend the preceding night camped within the precincts with all their goods and chattels by their side. Not an inch of space is left unoccupied by the time prescribed for the service, and the royal procession, consisting of the King, the archbishop of Mecca, the royal princes, the Ministers of State and others, preceded and followed by a veritable cohort of slaves and myrmidons, has to plough its way through the crowd to the places reserved in the

The Exodus to 'Arafat

portico. It is like a steamer making its way through the weeds of the Sargasso Sea.

I followed in the King's train struggling laboriously only to find the space around the pulpit so overcrowded that orderly prayer was impossible. Standing—for there was no room for sitting—in the midst of a human welter, hot and perspiring, I listened to the sermon, while the prayers that followed were indescribable. There was no room between the thickly packed rows of worshippers for the customary prostrations, in which the heads of one row were apt to come into conflict with the buttocks of those in front instead of reaching the ground as required. My neighbour on one such occasion was a man too devout to think that prayers offered in such circumstances could be of any value in the eyes of the Almighty and whispered loudly into my ear his intention of repeating the prayers in solitude for his own soul's satisfaction.

I contented myself with thinking that a little organization of the ceremony would obviate a good deal of physical discomfort and spiritual unrest. Yet many of those present appeared to be oblivious to everything but the sermon, and one man in my neighbourhood attracted my attention by emitting a long loud snake-like rattle, which seemed to ooze out from his corpulent body and ended in a violent convulsion that shook the upper towel from his shoulders and suddenly left him in an attitude of consummate peace. It was a remarkable performance.

The sermon was preached by Shaikh 'Abdullah ibn Hasan, the chief ecclesiastic of Mecca, who mounted the steps of the simple pulpit, camel-stick in hand, and proceeded to set forth in some detail the ordinances of the Prophet regarding the pilgrimage. The congregation from time to time gave vent to tears or tearful demonstrations as the memories of the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage of A.D. 632—almost exactly 1,300 years ago—were brought freshly to mind. Close by me an aged Indian lay convulsed in sobs, and one began to feel in common with one's fellow-worshippers something of the solemnity of an occasion, designed to keep alive in the hearts of men the story of an inspiration which had reached its climax on this

The Meccan Pilgrimage

very spot so many centuries ago in the perfection of a faith which in the interval has spread far beyond the borders of Arabia to be a guiding light to millions upon millions in Asia and Africa and even in Europe.

Under the Turkish and Sharifian regimes this sermon appears to have formed part of the ceremony of the "standing" on 'Arafat and to have been preached from the back of a camel on or near the Mount of Mercy itself in the midst of the *Mahmals* and other forgotten emblems of worldly pomp and ceremony.

The word *Mahmal*, literally meaning "carrier," is used in connection with the pilgrimage to signify the ceremonial camel-borne canopies or litters which were annually sent down with the pilgrim-caravans from Damascus and Cairo by or on behalf of the Turkish Sultan and the Egyptian Khedive respectively in token of the sovereignty claimed by them—the Khedive being of course the Sultan's viceroy at any rate up to the time of the Great War—over the holy cities of the Hijaz. It is believed that this custom originated in the preparations made on a certain occasion long ago for the visit to Mecca of an Egyptian (or Turkish) princess, who was in the end unable to make the journey but insisted on sending her sumptuous litter filled with valuable gifts for the shrines at Mecca and Madina by way of proxy. Since then the *Mahmals* had been regarded as an official symbol of the authority of the Sultan-Calif and his Viceroy until 1926, when the conquest of the Hijaz by the *Wahhabi* ruler and his assumption of the royal title deprived the canopies of all significance—the Damascus *Mahmal*, which Charles Doughty accompanied down into Arabia in 1876, had indeed been discontinued long before the advent of the *Wahhabis*. Nevertheless, the Egyptian *Mahmal* was duly sent to the Hijaz in 1926 and installed at Muna during the pilgrimage. Its presence was, however, resented by the fanatical *Wahhabis* and a disturbance ensued, in which shots were exchanged. That was the end of the Egyptian *Mahmal* and the beginning of a decade of coolness between the Sa'udi and Egyptian Governments. At the end of this period, however, the quarrel was made up to the mutual satisfaction of both parties and, in

The Exodus to 'Arafat

token thereof, the Egyptian *Mahmal* visited the Hijaz once more, but only once. It was not allowed to proceed further than Jidda, and, having served its purpose as an outward and visible sign of the reconciliation of the two Governments, was thereafter discontinued in deference to *Wahhabi* susceptibilities on the initiative of the Egyptian Government.

To return from this digression to the sermon at Namira, it was followed by the noon and afternoon prayers, combined in accordance with the Prophet's practice and led by Shaikh 'Abdullah from his place before the *Mihrab* or niche oriented towards Mecca. The congregation then dispersed and swarmed out of the mosque in a sort of *sauve qui peut*. We returned to our tents, and there the King was visited by various Indian and other pilgrims desirous of saluting the Prince of the Faithful. They were provided with coffee and food, and soon after 1 p.m. the King was in the saddle with his bodyguard moving to the culminating ceremony of the "standing" on 'Arafat.

The royal bodyguard was at this time entirely composed of His Majesty's henchmen from Najd, some 200 or 300 strong—a sturdy, tough-looking body of men, all clad like the other pilgrims in the white garments of the *Ihram* but differentiated from them by the fact that they carried rifles and cartridge-belts, swords and daggers. Latterly it has been considered more consonant with the King's dignity to have an escort of "regular" troops trained on the European model and instructed in the arts of saluting and heel-clicking. During the pilgrimage, however, even regular troops have to discard their uniforms and wear the *Ihram*, so that the scene has not changed except to the experienced eye, which easily detects the (generally) town-bred soldier from the desert-born janissary. Even so and in spite of the presence of the official royal escort the old bodyguard has not disbanded itself, and is always to be found somewhere near the King's body, to guard it against all harm.

The Mount of Mercy, whose chief feature is a low granitic hummock about 100 to 150 feet high marked by a white pillar, is in fact a ridge with three low peaks, whose sand-covered slopes descend to form a semicircular enclave bounded

The Meccan Pilgrimage

on the outer side by the masonry of the 'Ain Zubaida aqueduct. Outside this hill-mass to west and south lay the plain of 'Arafat with its temporary city of tents. All this area to the border of Wadi 'Arna is "standing" ground, but a low mass of rocks on the south side of the arena above described is regarded as the spot on which the Prophet "stood" for the ceremony on the occasion of his farewell pilgrimage. Here accordingly is the traditional "standing" area of the people of Najd and into this space they duly gathered in their thousands and tens of thousands from about 2 p.m. onwards, when the King and his party with the green *Wahhabi* standards unfurled in their midst took up their positions. Every man remained mounted on his camel facing not towards the hill (which is, however, permissible) but towards the *Qibla*, the Meccan *Ka'ba*. Among the crowd were also the covered litters of women screened from male gaze. Thus bareheaded and in the scant pilgrim robes with never an umbrella to disgrace the scene (though they were common enough among the non-*Najdi* elements on the plain) the huge throng remained through the afternoon from 2 p.m. to sunset reciting the prayers prescribed for the occasion, an endless prayer for the forgiveness of God and the remission of sins. At the head of the *Najdi* group, bareheaded like the rest, stood the King, flanked by his brothers and sons, reading from the little "book of words" published by his order for the guidance of the congregation.

In other parts of the vast field, which I seized the opportunity to visit during the afternoon, there seemed to be more of a festival air. Groups of people remained in their tents rather than face the downward rays of the sun—fierce enough in the circumstances though a cool dry breeze did much to mitigate the severity of the ordeal even in the open. The poorer folk had brought along a few palm-fronds with them, which they rigged up with sacking to form small tents and shelters, while the negroes from Africa grouped themselves on the flanks of the hill and along the Zubaida channel whence they got water in plenty to drink and for their ablutions.

This African element, collectively known as *Takruni* (*pl. Takarina*) though it comprises many different tribes of the

The Exodus to 'Arafat

Dark Continent—as widely separated, for instance, as the Sudan and Nigeria—is of considerable interest. The *Takarina* are, of course, all Muslims, but they seem to retain curious remnants of their original taboos and customs. On one occasion, for instance, I came upon a group of women solemnly digging shallow holes in the sand in which to deposit their hair-combings of weeks or perhaps even months past—presumably in the superstitious belief that the presence of their hair in the sacred soil would assure their enjoyment of eternal felicity. Then during the “standing” ceremony, about halfway through the afternoon, I observed a regular procession of several hundreds of these Africans making its way through the city of tents to the Mount of Mercy, on whose lower slopes they stood in serried ranks facing Mecca and intoning their ritual patter. In former times they probably performed this ceremony on the summit of the hill, access to which is now forbidden under the *Wahhabi* regime, which in general disapproves of extravagances of all kinds. To enforce the prohibition, guards are placed round the hill about halfway up, but on one occasion I noticed a man, apparently a religious dignitary of sorts, who had managed to evade the cordon of custodians and stood out conspicuously on the summit near its whitened pillar, gesticulating in the manner of one conducting an orchestra and apparently preaching a sermon, of which no word could be heard above the din of the crowds on the plain. The guards soon became aware of his intrusion on to forbidden ground and he suddenly disappeared—I know not how or whither.

Most of these *Takarina* spend several years on their journey from their homes to Mecca, generally working their way across the African continent and often spending several years on the cotton plantations of the Sudan. I once met a man and wife who had started out with a single child and had a family of six on the completion of their pilgrimage—their journey up to this point having taken fourteen years. But the most venerable *Takruni* pilgrim of my experience was a sturdy old man, who claimed to be 120 years old and to have spent no less than seventy years on the road from Lagos to Jidda, where I met him in 1930. His whole life had been spent in the study of

The Meccan Pilgrimage

Islamic religion and philosophy, and his long journey had involved considerable sojourns at various centres of learning on the way. By careful cross-examination I elicited from him the interesting fact that he had been in Khartum in the year of General Gordon's death at the hands of the *Mahdi's* force.

Altogether there was a striking absence of all ceremonial in the proceedings at 'Arafat. People seemed to do much what they liked, the fact that they were pitched on the plain during the prescribed hours being satisfaction of the obligation connoted by the term "standing."

The Egyptian contingent had a ritual of its own as one might expect. During my wanderings I noticed a large gathering of men and women—obviously folk of some substance—lined up in rows behind a chorus-leader with their backs turned on Mecca and their faces to the Mount of Mercy as they repeated in unison the sentences intoned by the leader and waved their handkerchiefs towards the hill as they did so. This was obviously a ritual surviving from the days of the *Mahmal* and nobody seemed to worry about their strange proceedings for the *Wahhabi* legions—positively legions—were on the other side of the hill, well out of sight. Elsewhere the "standing" crowds held services of their own in little groups of twenty or thirty persons in the shelter of their large tents or awnings, or merely sat or lay about drinking tea or even sleeping out the weary hours of the ordeal till sunset.

Perhaps in Turkish or Sharifian times, when the standing took the form of an organized service and the various stages of the sermon on the mount were punctuated by gunfire or other devices, the ceremony may have been more spectacular or imposing, but one had only to turn to the *Najdi* arena to realize that a new spirit had come into the 'Arafat celebrations—a conviction of the essential purpose of the pilgrimage and of the human duty of humility and endurance that alone make it "acceptable" to God.

In due course though very slowly, the blazing sun relented of his fierceness as he sank towards the crest of Jabal Thaur over against Mecca. The disc sank till it became invisible behind the line of the black hills. The prayers melted into a palpable

The Return to Mecca

silence, after which came a faint rustling and, in a moment, the sun having set, the great cavalcade was once more in motion for the return journey. So far as I can remember no writer has previously emphasized the fact that the 'Arafat ceremony is essentially a festival of the camel. As I moved forward with the royal cavalcade and cast my eyes over the scene it was the camel that chiefly impressed me. All over the immense plain, suddenly in motion towards the valley leading back to Mecca, it was the lines and phalanxes of camels that caught my eye. There must have been some 50,000 of them at least, and all moving forward together at the silent, hurried pace characteristic of the chief carrier of Arabia. It was, indeed, a goodly scene and, as the dusk increased and the dust rose from the padding feet, our legions seemed to lose reality and to become as it were a ghostly, heavenly host, moving so silently, so mysteriously in the dim limbo of a twilight illuminated by the moon above with Mars and Jupiter ahead and Sirius, Betelgeuse and Capella in their train. For all the light of the moon it soon became impossible to see anything clearly in that moving mist with the white-shrouded bodies of men raised high aloft on their giant steeds. Past stunted shrubs and thorny acacia bushes we brushed and, as the valley narrowed between the darkening hills, we swept past litter-bearing caravans and groups of walking men and women—nay, even groups seated, resting on the ground as if conscious by instinct that that celestial host would pass over them without harm. It was amazing how, though we could scarcely see more than a few paces ahead, the camels instinctively avoided all obstacles in their path, human or otherwise, which rapidly receded through our phalanx to the rear.

III. THE RETURN TO MECCA

PASSING into Meccan territory through the boundary pillars, we marched up the valley and through the Mazumain pass, where there suddenly burst upon us a fairy scene as of some huge city with its myriad lights, great arc-lamps in regular

The Meccan Pilgrimage

lines and smaller lanterns perched on posts. There had been no trace of this city at our passing in the morning. It had grown up suddenly in the valley since dusk. This was Muzdalifa, where we were to spend the night according to the Prophet's practice. The King's party moved towards the left flank of the valley and halted on a slope of sand not far from the mosqueless minaret. The motor vehicles had introduced an element of disorder and confusion into the scene and certainly made the night hideous enough, but there were apparently no accidents and the royal household was in due course accommodated in the tents set up for its use.

Motor-cars were tending to become an increasing element in the pilgrimage scene. At the time of which I write the privilege of using them was still confined to the royal family and officials on duty, but in 1935 permission was granted to a wider circle, while in the following year all restrictions were removed and the number of motor vehicles taking part in the ceremony was not less than 400. Since then the number has steadily increased, and foreign pilgrims who can afford the luxury have now little to complain of in the matter of comfort.

All around was the murmuring of camels and the cries of men calling to their missing companions—a veritable orchestra of discord. How anybody found anyone else in that mushroom city of a night, which none had seen nor was to see by day—for we would be on the move again long before sunrise—was a mystery to me.

The King himself camped in the open on rugs spread over the sandy slope, and in due course a noble meal of mutton and rice on a dozen portentous trays was spread out on a long carpet for our refreshment. We ate with a will, and after us the rest of the escort; and then the King ordered his henchmen to go forth and bring in the wayfaring pilgrims, who came in their hundreds, eager, famished, to feed at the royal table and, as I noticed in many cases, to put by in the corner of their grizzled robes some provender for the morrow. And they went their way rejoicing with full bellies and loud thanks. We slept.

I woke again seemingly in the middle of the night to the sound of grinding cars and groaning camels. The King was a

The Return to Mecca

few paces off engrossed in his religious reading and soon, though I was still heavy with sleep, we lined up for the dawn prayer about 3 a.m. We then mounted and moved off to the minaret of Muzdalifa where we halted, though remaining mounted, for about half an hour for a ceremony of prayer and thanksgiving prescribed by the Prophet for those reaching this point on their return journey. The minaret was hung with great arc-lamps, and groups of pilgrims seemed to be gathered about it and even on the squat tower by its side. Others groped about in the sand of the valley, which is Wadi Muhassir, to collect the forty-nine pebbles larger than a peanut needed for the coming lapidation of the "devils." We had incidentally collected ours from the ground where we had camped for the night—it would seem that they may be collected from anywhere in the Muzdalifa neighbourhood though Wadi Muhassir is the place prescribed by tradition—and had duly made them fast in a corner of our towels.

Later, however, I noticed at Muna that many of the pilgrims, unmindful of the special virtue of stones gathered at Muzdalifa according to the Prophet's injunctions, were groping about in the gritty streets of the village for the requisite missiles. It may readily be imagined that 50,000 pilgrims hurling forty-nine pebbles apiece at the effigies of Satan, which will be explained in due course, succeeded in adding substantially to the rubble-heaps of Muna, which in the course of centuries should grow into mounds of considerable size—but for a putative miracle resulting, as is commonly believed, in the spontaneous disappearance of each year's contribution of execration before the next instalment becomes due.

As the light of day slowly grew upon us the arc-lamps were removed from the minaret and, our prayers over, we resumed our advance up the valley towards Muna. Here or hereabouts our camels suddenly shied at something on the path, which proved to be a camel that had fallen and died by the way. I also observed one stretcher on which a sick or injured person was being carried, but I may say here that all through the proceedings up to this point and indeed up to my return to Mecca the same morning I had noticed no other sign of any

The Meccan Pilgrimage

casualty in the vast throng—perhaps 100,000 pilgrims in all.

Moving through the gradually lessening gloom we came to Muna where the King immediately exchanged his camel for a horse and proceeded forthwith up the street of Muna to the 'Aqaba for the obligatory lapidation of the "Great Devil." Most people had dismounted to follow him, but I did so on my camel, which I only left when the crowd became too dense as we neared our destination. Completing the last hundred yards on foot I arrived at the 'Aqaba to find an amazing crowd gathered below, pelting him with the pebbles brought from Muzdalifa, seven pebbles each on this occasion. The people seemed seized with a sort of frenzy as they plied their hands in the joyous task with the formulæ of execration on their lips, and it was quite impossible to approach near enough to cast my pebbles at the object of the common wrath. My missiles probably alighted on the unheeding heads of those in front.

For the moment that was the end of the ceremony for me, as I found the King's brother 'Abdullah mounting a car to return to Mecca for the next stage of the pilgrim rites and was lucky enough to find a place with him. In less than half an hour I was back in my own house enjoying a light breakfast before facing the Meccan ceremonies which would complete and consolidate my *Hajj*. The essential conditions of the *Hajj* proper are (1) to assume the *Ihram* which I had done some thirty-six hours before; (2) to "stand" at 'Arafat, which had also been safely accomplished; and (3) to stone the "Great Devil" immediately on return from 'Arafat, and proceed to Mecca to perform the *Tawaf* (circuit of the Ka'ba) and *Sa'i* (the running between Safa and Marwa) and to have a shave and haircut. Having completed the threefold ceremonies of the third requisite, the pilgrim resumes ordinary clothes and is finally released from all the obligations of *Ihram*. By performing only the first two of these conditions (and leaving the third to another time) he similarly becomes free of all restrictions with the sole exception that intercourse with women is forbidden until he has fulfilled the third condition also. Those who are not accompanied by their womenfolk often defer the

The Ceremonies at Mecca

Meccan ceremonies till the end of the three days of the Muna holiday.

IV. THE CEREMONIES AT MECCA

THOUGH it was but little past 6 a.m. when I got back to Mecca, the main street was already overflowing with returning pilgrims, who must have omitted the Muzdalifa stage of the ritual and travelled, walking or camel-borne, all night to get there in time. The *Haram* area was crowded and the *Mas'a* or track between Safa and Marwa, which the main street cuts obliquely, was thronged with urgent, surging crowds running, walking, pushing, praying, this way and that.

Having refreshed myself and rested awhile I drove back to the *Haram* soon after 7 a.m. to get through the *Tawaf* and *Sa'i* before the sun was far enough up to make things hot. I drew up at the *Bab Ibrahim*, the main door of the south frontage of the Great Mosque, and entered through a crowd of beggars anxiously assuring me of their hopes for the "acceptance" of my pilgrimage and in turn accepting without ceremony the mites that I drew from my pocket.

A dead dove of the *Haram* lay crushed and bloody against the jamb of the doorway—a rare sight and I know not to what cause due—while its myriad mates within the precincts went on as usual with their endless business of decorous lovemaking. A Syrian in the service of the Haidarabad (Deccan) Nidham accosted me within with queries as to the probability of an early steamer for Egypt, and began to expound to me his scheme for the partition of the whole world on the basis of the two-party system—the party of God and the party of the Devil. I noticed from his printed visiting card, duly handed to me with an expression of his desire to discuss matters in greater detail with me, that my friend was the founder (and presumptive prime minister) of the former though I was somewhat surprised to learn that the latter would not in his opinion be altogether without a Muslim element!

However, my mind wandered to other things and I extri-

The Meccan Pilgrimage

cated myself with all possible politeness from his company and proceeded on my way. Before me stood the great *Ka'ba* (the holy of holies of the Great Mosque) in a state of semi-nudity.

Among the gifts for the Meccan shrine brought down with the Egyptian *Mahmal* in former years was the heavy pall of black embroidered silk known as the *Kiswa* and made to the measurements of the *Ka'ba*, which it was intended to drape from roof to floor. Every year, on the day following the pilgrimage, the new *Kiswa* replaces its predecessor, which becomes the perquisite of the keepers of the shrine and is cut up into square pieces for profitable sale to the pilgrims. The pall is made with wide slits to fit over the Black Stone and the *Yamani* Stone, which are built into their respective corners of the *Ka'ba* at chest height and always remain exposed to view. The former, believed to be of meteoric origin, is the most sacred emblem of Islam with a long history going back to the days of Abraham and is kissed or saluted by all persons making the prescribed circumambulation of the building. It is encased in an oval frame of solid silver and its outer surface has been partly worn away by multitudinous osculation through the centuries.

The *Yamani* Stone is a broken but mended block of grey granite, of whose history nothing appears to be known and which is touched with the hand each time the pilgrim passes it in his courses. The *Kiswa* has a third opening to fit over the doorway of the *Ka'ba*, but this is fitted with a flap of the same material heavily embroidered with letters and decorations of gold and silver, which can be rolled up when the door is to be opened for the admission of pilgrims. The interior of this "House of God," once the repository of priceless treasures—the gifts of kings and princes—is plain in the extreme and not of great interest. Since the trouble between the Sa'udi and Egyptian Governments already referred to, a special factory has been set up in Mecca itself for the manufacture of the *Kiswa*, but it must be admitted that this has resulted in some falling off in the quality both of the material and of the workmanship. Quite recently, however, Egypt, now reconciled with

The Ceremonies at Mecca

Sa'udi Arabia, has resumed the manufacture of the covering for the Meccan shrine.

The weathered and rain-stained *Kiswa* of last year had now been rolled up a dozen feet exposing the solid basalt masonry of the building, massive square-cut blocks of unequal size bound together with a strong greyish mortar. The silver *umbo* of the Black Stone projected naked from its corner, for all the world like the hawse-pipe of a steamer; and on the side between this corner (east) and that of the *Yamani* Stone, on the south, the new garment, made in its Meccan factory, had already been let down by a party of workmen on the roof to take the place of the old. In its shining blue-black glossiness of velvety silk, with a splendid band of gold arabesque two-thirds of the way up, it stood out in striking contrast with the washed-out drapery that still clung to the other three sides, to be replaced as fast as the men could work. And even as I watched the great sheet of new drapery for the main (north-east) front was let down with a rush to bury momentarily under its skirt the crowd of pilgrims pressing forward with prayerful invocations to the raised lintel of the great silvered door which was at this time open under the guardianship of members of the Bani Shaiba family—the hereditary holders of the Key of the *Ka'ba* by divine decree—for the admission of those who could pay the price. When the four pieces of the *Kiswa* are in place they are duly dressed and joined up by workmen lowered from the roof on a platform operated by a wooden crane and pulley—the last item of the proceeding being the filling of the gap of the *Kiswa* over the *Ka'ba* doorway by the rich *Burqa'* or veil of silk and gold-lettered arabesque.

For the moment my business was the performance of the *Tawaf*, the sevenfold circuit of the *Ka'ba* beginning with the kissing or salutation of the Black Stone: "In the name of God; God is Great." Two uniformed policemen stood on duty at this spot to regulate the ever-increasing pressure and keep the stream flowing. To do this they had to use their canes and fists freely enough, and the scene round this, the most sacred spot in the Islamic world, was one of amazing commotion and confusion, which suggested to a European mind thoughts of

The Meccan Pilgrimage

traffic regulation, barriers and turnstiles. But a little thought was enough to convince me that nothing of the kind was either feasible (though practicable enough if desired) or desirable. It would go against the basic principles of Islam which, though essentially a democratic and socialist creed, does prescribe and inculcate one element of individualism which at certain moments—and only at those moments—makes the human ego all-important above the claims of society, race and even family. Each Muslim, man, woman or child, is personally responsible for the achievement of his own salvation at all costs. That is not only his responsibility but his bounden duty to be performed without regard to the consequences to himself or others. King, country, family go to the wall where their claims conflict with those of God. They may punish individualism that injures their interests but they cannot save from the Fire. That must be avoided at all costs and can only be avoided—and that only by the grace of God—by single-minded devotion to the Almighty. The principle involves the highest kind of patriotism that the world has ever known; and one prays only for right guidance when one has to decide between the laws of God—the great and eternal spiritual state of the hereafter which embraces all the occupants of the whole universe—and the laws of man—the petty, puny, short-lived human state of a world surely doomed to annihilation. The abortive rebellion of Faisal al Duwish and his fellows against Ibn Sa'ud in 1930 is perhaps as good an instance as one can find in modern history of misguidance in the application of a principle that is basic and innate in Islam. "Man proposes but God disposes." Faisal, honestly trying according to his lights to serve his God, died in prison for the presumption that drove him into rising against his King.

Hence in a setting that is nothing if not democratic and socialist (if one may borrow an often misused term from modern politics) an individualism that leads to riot or confusion at moments of ritual celebration. At such moments spiritual energy transcends the intellectual, and those who believe in the basic doctrines of Islam can scarcely wish it otherwise. The harmonizing of the two energies, thus liable to

The Ceremonies at Mecca

come into conflict at a crisis, should not be beyond the power of mankind; and that, after all, is the ultimate function of statecraft in the transient governments that succeed one another with (historically) bewildering rapidity in this lowly scene of man's endeavour. The ordered ceremonial of modern Meccan pilgrimages under the present *Wahhabi* regime is indeed evidence of much success already attained in this direction. The pilgrim is at any rate safe, comfortable, contented, well provided with water and medical attention, free from exacting attentions and attentive exactions, while a Government which sincerely believes that no man dies except of God's will has done more, far more, than any of its less religious predecessors to reduce the death-rate of the pilgrimage.

In 1931 there were only forty deaths in a gathering of some 100,000 pilgrims; and each succeeding year saw an improvement on that figure, the deaths in 1934 being only fifteen in a concourse of 80,000 persons. In the sixteen years of King Ibn Sa'ud's reign there have been no epidemics during the season of the pilgrimage—a great tribute to the Government's Medical and Sanitary Department.

What matter then if the pilgrim occasionally loses control at the sublime moments of his ecstasy? What matter if he crowds and crushes when a little self-restraint, universally practised, would create a steady and unimpeded flow at the physically narrow centres of exaltation and self-realization? Barriers and turnstiles would perhaps throw back the press to other points of ingress and egress but, after all, nothing can alter the physical configuration of the Meccan valley, while the gradual progress of modernization is already sufficiently advanced to ensure improvements where they are needed without jeopardizing the symbolism of a historic faith.

To return from this digression, the press round the Black Stone deterred me from any attempt at a near approach, and I began my rounds with the prescribed formula and a distant salutation, to find myself engulfed forthwith in the whirling human stream that walked or ran or trotted round the half-draped cube, whose actual circumference including the projecting marble-walled space of Ishmael's chamber is almost

The Meccan Pilgrimage

exactly 200 feet. At least 5,000 persons must have been within the circular marble-paved basin of the *Mataf* at the time, and an amazing kaleidoscope it was of many-nationed Islam. As a citizen of Mecca I went alone, already knowing the prescribed formulæ well enough to be my own conductor, while others, strangers from all parts of the world and little versed in the universal tongue of their prayers, went round in greater or smaller companies led by *Mutawwifs* (the tourist agents of this country) repeating after them in loud chorus the staccato divisions of the circuit ritual. Here went women, half-protected from the knocks and pushes of the rushing crowd by the encircling arms of their husbands or brothers; there an infant carried on a velvet cushion by a *Mutawwif* and followed by the mother and other womenfolk of its household; here a crippled deformity among God's creatures encircling God's house on all fours, careless of his immediate fate, intent only on ultimate salvation; and there the blind, the halt and the maimed amidst the press of their luckier fellows. As I approached the *Yamani* Stone in the southern corner, down which it is customary to draw the right hand as one passes, my foot accidentally, and not very heavily, came down on that of a neighbour. In a trice he had retaliated with a savage jab of the offended foot against the offending and, as I looked at him in mild surprise, considering the place and the circumstance of his attack, I saw in the weerish visage of the Bukharan such a concentration of vice and spite as I had scarcely deemed possible in a human countenance. "Tut, tut!" I murmured, "ask pardon of God," and we passed out of each other's ken for ever.

In due course the seven circuits were accomplished and I was back where I had begun—at the Black Stone. Nearer approach being physically impossible without acute discomfort, I again saluted the holy emblem from afar and pushed my way through the outer fringes of the circling crowd to the "Place of Abraham," or as near it as I could get, for the customary two-bow prayer in celebration of the *Tawaf* duly performed. After this the usual practice is to stand before the door of the *Ka'ba* and as near to it as possible—indeed right up against the wall with arms upraised upon the *Kiswa* itself in an attitude of

The Ceremonies at Mecca

despairing imploration—and to murmur such petitions for the betterment of one's lot in the present and in the inexorable hereafter as one may desire to make. Owing to the press I omitted this step in the proceedings and refreshed myself with a draught of water from the historic and sacred well of Zamzam, offered to pilgrims according to custom in metal cups into which it is poured from pear-shaped earthen pots by the *Zamzamis* (water-carriers), whom I duly rewarded in suitable proportion to the special occasion, a shilling for perhaps half a pint of the blessed beverage which, I may take this occasion to remark, has been almost universally and quite unjustly maligned by those who have written of the Meccan ceremonies before me. There is indeed a brackish taste in this water but of the slightest and, when cold as it always should be if left awhile in the porous earthen pots, I have always found it a pleasant and refreshing drink—mildly beneficial to the internal machinery of the body and, surely, the most historic and sacred of all earth's waters. I frankly do not understand the aspersions of Burton, Wavell, Eldon, Rutter and others and, for the benefit of the ignorant, I may add that the well is now (and has for some considerable time been) protected from all possible contamination by the building which completely covers it.

This precaution was certainly necessary, for cases have been known of persons committing suicide by jumping into the well in the mistaken belief that its water would shrive them for immediate admittance to Paradise. Many pilgrims bring with them the winding-sheets in which they intend to be buried in due course, to wash in this Zamzam water though not actually, of course, in the well.

Incidentally, the importance of Zamzam, which is situated in the Mosque only a few paces from the *Ka'ba*, derives from the tradition that it was miraculously discovered by Hagar when she and her child Ishmael were dying of thirst in the desert valley. Abraham, under divine direction, then built the *Ka'ba* in the image of God's celestial residence, to become the nucleus of the Great Mosque which itself became the nucleus of Mecca. The "Place of Abraham" mentioned above is tradi-

The Meccan Pilgrimage

tionally regarded as the spot at which the Patriarch dwelt (or said his prayers) while engaged in the building of the *Ka'ba*. The chamber of Ishmael, also mentioned above, was the child's nursery.

The last few drops in my second cup were sprinkled over my head and face by the *Zamzami* and I girt up my loins for the "running." Issuing from the *Haram* by the Safa gate I joined the throng proceeding to the head of the *Mas'a* or drome—an old mound now built up with several broad steps of basalt and granite and adorned with a comparatively modern arched superstructure. In former times those standing on this mound could see the *Ka'ba* towards which the opening formulæ of the "running" are addressed with hands uplifted. Now the intervening houses and the *Haram* wall prevent the actual view. The formulæ pronounced, one descends for the "course." The throng of "runners" going and coming in dense gangs or smaller groups or singly without order or method was terrific. One had to make one's way through the press as best one could, dodging here and dodging there to avoid the heavier phalanxes. For the first hundred paces one proceeds at a walk to the crossways formed by the cutting of the *Mas'a* street by the Ghashashiya road and its continuation along the eastern wall of the *Haram* to the *Hamidiya* or Government headquarters. At this point a pilaster set in the wall of the *Haram* marks the beginning of the section to be covered according to ancient practice at the pace known as *Harwala*, a sort of shuffle-run. In former times as in our more spacious days of motors this crossing carried the main highway of the city and the shuffle-run was doubtless designed as a very necessary aid to traffic. A green pillar on the right hand side of the *Mas'a*, built into a shop wall, marks the end of the *Harwala* section, whose whole length is fifty-three paces. Here one resumes at a walk for the remaining 306 paces of the course, now a broad street covered over and lined with shops on both sides, to the mound of Marwa, similar to that of Safa and similarly furnished with broad steps and an arched superstructure. The whole of the *Mas'a*, roughly 380 yards in length, has during the reign of the present King been cobble-paved—a great improvement on

Muna

the old regime of flying dust and uncleanable, accumulated filth and rubbish which used to make a real penance of the "running."

During the course the pilgrim repeats the prescribed formulæ of the occasion, and at Marwa he turns towards Safa, standing on the steps with upraised hands, to repeat further formulæ, after which he descends to return to Safa. Seven times in all, four from Safa to Marwa and three in the reverse direction, one does this course and at the end of the seventh lap the ceremonies of the great pilgrimage are duly completed, all except the shaving or the hair-cutting according to choice or tenets, to aid in which an army of barbers throng the Marwa end of the *Mas'a* and appear to do a flourishing business. I preferred to do my own hair-trimming at home, and having done my course of 2,660 yards—it was now about 9 a.m. and getting warm—I was glad enough of my car to take me thither. In all respects my first pilgrimage was duly and faithfully completed, and during the coming days of festival my friends and acquaintances would wish me its "acceptance" and all the blessings implied thereby. I had now duly become a *Hajji*, a title little used in Arabia itself, where most men may be assumed to perform the pilgrimage some time or other in their lives, though it is stated—with some appearance of truth—that there are or have till quite recently been greybeard, lifelong residents of Mecca itself who have never performed this essential rite! It seems incredible, but things have changed since the bad old days of Turk and Sharif, when the main functions of the Meccan were to make the pilgrimage as onerous as possible for the stranger within his gates, while he himself avoided the very real dangers and troubles of the pilgrim way.

V. MUNA

I REMAINED quietly at home through the heat of the day, and it was not till mid-afternoon that I drove out again in my car to Muna, where I found the King almost alone in his great

The Meccan Pilgrimage

new audience-chamber. Throughout the Muslim world outside the limits of the Meccan territory this day, the *'Id al Azha* or the Festival of the Sacrifice in commemoration of the story of Abraham, is celebrated rather than the actual day of 'Arafat itself. Little attempt seems, however, to be made to co-ordinate the date of this holiday for simultaneous observance the world over, and on this occasion it so happened that, while London made holiday with us, India had elected for the morrow (Wednesday, 29th April) for its celebration of the *Bakri 'Id*.

As for Mecca, the ceremonies which I have already described seem to break up the day in such a way that the usual sunrise service of the festival is either not held at all or held only for the benefit of a small congregation. As far as I am aware there was no such service in the *Haram* itself, though those who deferred the *Tawaf* and other Meccan ceremonies doubtless forgathered in the Muna mosque of Khaif. I missed, moreover, the actual ceremony of the sacrificing in the morning and my personal sacrifice was offered by proxy the following day; but I may add that during these three days at Muna I neither saw nor by other less agreeable processes became aware of the great slaughter on which others have written with so much critical emotion—nor even saw the slaughter-place now wisely removed to a reasonable distance from the main camps of the pilgrims and divided therefrom by the picturesque encampment of the human scavengers of the holy land—the *Takruni* colony of African residents and visitors to whom nothing comes amiss that is edible. I certainly saw a few severed sheep-heads lying about where perhaps they should not have been, but otherwise there was neither stench nor offensive sight of sun-grilled putrefactions. The medical authorities have unquestionably done this part of their work exceedingly well, and their reward this year was the smallest death-rate on record for the pilgrimage up to date. And the flies, of which we hear so much! Where were they? Certainly not on pilgrimage as stands to reason—they would come some days later no doubt when the pilgrims would have made good their departure. But there would be no one for them to worry or infect. The place would be deserted as it had been till but a few days ago. And to round

Muna

off the tale of the blessings of Muna—what joy it was to sleep out in the open under that brilliant sky with no protection against the mosquito and no mosquito to molest one's slumbers!

Tradition has it that the Prophet spent the day of the actual sacrifice and the two following days at Muna. That practice is therefore incorporated in the programme of the pilgrimage, but it is not obligatory except in so far that each pilgrim should at noon or soon afterwards on the second and third days cast his seven stones at each of the three "devils" either personally or by proxy. Even the total omission of the rite of "stoning" on these two days (though this concession does not apply to the "stoning" of the "Great Devil" on the first day which is an essential element of the pilgrimage) does not invalidate the *Hajj*, though it should be arranged for by proxy if possible or otherwise atoned for by the sacrifice of a sheep or a goat.

In fact, the vast majority of pilgrims ordinarily remain at Muna for these days of "Drying Flesh," making holiday and resting from the labours of the actual pilgrimage—a sufficient trial in all conscience for the women, the very old and the very young. The whole broad space of the valley between the two black ridges of Thabir and Mifjar was filled with a veritable city of tents and tabernacles, completely dwarfing the few masonry houses of the village which, however, were all occupied by those ready to pay exorbitant rents for the avoidance of the imagined discomfort of tents. The main street had become a flourishing bazaar, where the vendors of cheap and worthless souvenirs of the *Hajj* and purveyors of cooling drinks (apricots had just come into season and looked tempting enough as also the little squat local cucumbers) had spread their wares on trays or cloths upon the ground on either side. Every fifth or sixth squatter was a money-changer, receiving or paying out rupees and piastres and other coins galore in exchange for the silver *Riyals* and *Halala* (nickel coins) of the Sa'udian regime.

All day long, and particularly during the grateful coolth of the early mornings and the evenings, the streets of Muna were thronged with a dense multitude moving this way and that. Through it at intervals a heavy motor water-van made its

The Meccan Pilgrimage

deliberate way, clearing a path before it with a broad spray of water mixed with some disinfectant fluid, laying the dust and slaying the germs in a single operation. At one point in the broader part of the street and about midway between the two "devils" a small Petter engine had been installed with an Aquatole chain pump equipment over a large subterranean cistern (fed at intervals by another water-cart). Round this pressed all day a crowd of the thirsty poor with tins and cans of every shape and size into which a municipal functionary, presiding aloft at the gushing water-outlet, tirelessly and good-humouredly baled the life-giving liquid—sometimes into the tins and sometimes, to the general amusement, over the heads and bodies of the crowd below.

A few yards from this scene of charitable work disfranchised royalty gazed from the upper casements of the great house placed at its disposal by the *Wahhabi* Government upon a scene of true democratic activity under the auspices of the only perfect autocracy of the modern world, an autocracy tempered in its absoluteness only by the laws of God. The grandson of an Ottoman Calif of the good old days, a young man more accustomed perhaps to the tennis courts and casinos of the Riviera than to the labours of the pilgrim way, had perhaps less to forget and forgive than one who but a short while since had worn a crown and even toyed with the ambition of wearing the Prophet's mantle before he had yielded to the lure of westernization. Amidst the throng in the street below Amanullah Khan, ex-King of the Afghans, may have noted wistfully many of his own former subjects and, noting, wondered whether Fate had done with him or might still be weaving his likeness into the pattern of the future. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," but the royal guests of the *Wahhabi* King, to say nothing of the few other distinguished visitors from India and Egypt, must surely have realized during these days that the substance, if not the shadow, of the Califate had passed—perhaps, who knows, for ever?—into the keeping of the new dynasty of the Arabs.

Eastward of the valley beyond the great concourse of pilgrim tents sat Ibn Sa'ud in his hall of audience, disposing of the

Muna

affairs of State, receiving reports and passing orders for the governance of his realm. A telephone connected him with Mecca and Jidda; a branch post-and-telegraph office brought him news from far and wide; the headquarters of the medical administration was housed in the local hospital to keep him in touch with the vital statistics so necessary to the world's welfare, for the Meccan pilgrimage is the cynosure of a wider audience than Arabia or its pilgrims. Even the Foreign Office was present in full force in attendance on the King. Business as usual was the order of the day, but concentration on the main business of the pilgrimage did not exclude attention to other matters.

Indeed one subject, a purely secular one of urgent economic importance, seemed during these days to overshadow every other and to some extent to cast a trail of gloom over the whole festival. Mecca and Jidda were, of course, on holiday with all shops shut and business at a standstill, but Muna had for the moment become the economic centre of the Hijaz. And Muna had for some reason become panic-stricken on the subject of the local currency. The nickel piastre of the Hijaz-Najd administration (nominally 220 to the £ gold) had suddenly undergone a serious depreciation, and the panic was beginning to cast long black shadows as far afield as Madina and Yanbu'. Even the Government was for the moment caught by the flood of depression and talked of stabilizing the nickel currency at a heavy discount to save a further fall. Fortunately, other and wiser counsels prevailed, and the panic was checked for the moment by vigorous administrative measures pending the consideration and adoption of a more permanent policy, the story of whose development and fortunes lies beyond the scope of this record.

The only ceremony of the second and third days of the holiday was the stoning of the three "devils." The three "devils" of Muna mark the spots at which the enemy of mankind is said to have appeared before Abraham to tempt him from the service of God as, by God's command, he led his son (Ishmael in the Arab tradition) to the place of sacrifice. And there to this day, close by the "Great Devil" and on the rocky slopes on the right hand of the pass as one looks down towards Mecca, stands

The Meccan Pilgrimage

a simple, ruinous shrine marking the spot where, to his infinite relief, Abraham lifted up his eyes to behold the mercy of the Lord—a ram entangled in a thicket to serve in place of Ishmael for the burnt offering to the God who had tried his servant and not found him wanting. Many of the pilgrims, doubtless preferring the cool of the morning and late afternoon for a somewhat arduous function involving in most cases a long walk and much jostling, seemed to ignore the fact that noon was the prescribed hour for this ceremony on both days. Indeed the stoning seemed to be taking place at all times from dawn to sunset, and on the third day many even of the Najd contingent including the King's following, doubtless anxious to be off to Mecca as soon as possible, were sallying forth from the royal camp on this errand when the King, becoming aware of the matter, peremptorily sent out his messengers to order them all back to their tents. There would seem to be no doubt that the stoning may not take place before the sun begins to descend from the meridian, and it was proposed that in future the proper time should be signalled by gunfire. Any time after noon and before sunset is apparently permissible, but the nearer to noon the better. At that hour the press about the "devils" is indeed a wonderful sight—a huge crowd all jostling to get near enough to cast its stones and pushed to and fro as a receding wave of satisfied execrators met the oncoming rush of their frenzied fellows, cleft now and again by the cavalcade of some royal prince, advancing on horseback with his prancing retinue to flout the effigy of Satan. Above it stood or sat a pair of soldiers, whose function was to keep order in the midst of a howling chaos and who spent their time grinning benignly as they dodged the ill-aimed pebbles of the faithful. To maintain order was impossible, and it was only a matter of wonderment that apparently no serious casualty occurred to mar the merriment of a mob gathered to commemorate a historic example of devotion.

And so, on the third day of the festival towards sunset the last stones were flung and the ceremonies of the great pilgrimage were over. The "devils" were left in peace for another year; and the crowd poured forth from Muna down

Muna

the valley, an endless stream of men, women and children, walking or riding, tired but happy and, above all, cleansed from the sins of the past—the heavy burden that all had carried in jeopardy until these days.

A woman of the *Badawin*, veiled from the gaze of man and modestly muffled in garments that hid her form, trotted gaily through the slowly wending crowd of those who walked and those who rode in litters. Without saddle or bridle she sat back on the lean rump of her dromedary and I mused, as my car carried me home through the pilgrim streams, that I had seen in her and her surroundings the spirit of Arabia coursing through the veins of Islam.

“THE CITY ILLUMINED”—MADINA

I. OUR ARRIVAL

FROM afar off—perhaps some ten miles as the crow flies—I looked down for the first time on the City of the Prophet, set in a grey-blue blur of rock and desert in which at that distance it was impossible to distinguish the long thick line of palms of the oasis from the low ridges of out-poured lava that almost completely girdle it with their oval frame within an outer setting of granite and basalt mountains. Of the city itself nothing stood out but the slender spires of the Prophet’s mosque—a beacon flashing its message of faith and hope far and wide to west and east and north and south. They were our guide for the rest of the journey as we sped down the slope between scattered basalt kopjes towards the pleasant little palm-groves of Abyar ’Ali in the bed of Wadi al Hasa as they call this particular section of Wadi ’Aqiq—the chief drainage line of the Madina basin and a tributary of the great Wadi Hamdh.

Much as I had read about the Prophet’s city and its district, I must confess that I was not altogether prepared either for its charm or for its insignificance. History and gossip had long since combined to create in my mind expectations of splendour now doomed to disappointment. As we approached nearer over the dismal barrier of the lava-field dividing the city area from the ’Aqiq valley and halted a moment on its eastern brink under the turret-crowned hillock ’Usaifir, I saw as it were the derelict carcass and bare bones of a departed glory with nothing to recall the fabled greatness of the past or to suggest hope for the future except only a single monument less than a century old—the mosque and tomb of the Prophet of Islam with its dull-green dome and shapely minarets pointing proudly to the leaden sky. The rest was but ruin at first sight—the great oasis but a straggling belt of palms of considerable length but little density or grandeur: the city walls broken or disfigured

Our Arrival

by additions and reparations: and the city itself as an outworn garment far too large for the body within it. Yet closer acquaintance would disclose unsuspected charms without anything that may be called beautiful except the mosque itself, and the days of my being at Madina were delightful indeed, far beyond the expectations created by my first impressions. It is quite definitely a city with a soul. Its appeal is to the spirit rather than to the mind. And the *genius loci*, fostered through the long centuries by genuine and unbroken local veneration, pervades the whole atmosphere of Madina even as the steepled casket of its shrine dominates the physical landscape. Though more exposed to the political storms and tempests of the world, the Prophet's city must be more like its old self—in all essentials—than is the great heterogeneous corporation that now fills the valley of Mecca, and has overflowed along and beyond its tributary ravines from the old mart and idol-centre of Bakka, in whose midst Muhammad planted the standard of his great faith.

The approach to Madina from the west is uninspiring. The dreary lava-field spills into the plain untidily in tongues as of coke and slag, and the resemblance to some town of our own "Black Country" is emphasized by the immediate proximity of the vast station yard, along the south side of which for about half a mile the road runs to the Anbariya Gate, flanked on the right by a pretentious mosque, with two tall minarets and wide flat dome, and on the left by the railway station itself, a long low well-built structure of basalt masonry facing eastward across a spacious "square" down the modern street designed to provide the newly arrived pilgrim or traveller with a vista of the *Haram* itself, as the Great Mosque is called.

At the gate fussy clerks barred the way, armed with pencils and registers, demanding our names and other particulars, regarding which I wrongly deemed they must have been fully posted long since either by wireless from Jidda or by our own messenger sent forward an hour or two before from Abyar 'Ali to announce our arrival. I suggested that they could have all the information they wanted in due course from the *Amir* and, half unwillingly, they let us past only to be wiggled on the

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

telephone a few minutes later by the Governor himself for not apprising him immediately of our arrival and identity. Neither the King nor the Government had warned the *Amir* to expect us and, strange as it may seem, Hamad, our *Najdi* chief of escort and messenger—a silly and useless sort of fellow as he was afterwards to prove—had mentioned the impending arrival of four cars including a wireless lorry and an Egyptian engineer without betraying the identity of the chief of the party—perhaps from reluctance to suggest that he himself did not occupy that position.

The *Amir* of Madina is 'Abdul 'Aziz ibn Ibrahim, a *Najdi* of some note and apparently of Dawasir origin though best known as a distinguished citizen of Haïl where he lived many years with the Rashids in estrangement from Ibn Sa'ud for some matter of which I know naught. With the capture of Haïl by the latter in 1921 he became reconciled with his natural and inevitable sovereign, who found worthy work for his hands on the Hijaz frontier in connection with the operations that led up to the final *Wahhabi* triumph. After a period of service at Abha, capital of the 'Asir highlands, he went as Governor to Taïf, whence four years later he was promoted to his present responsible but not unduly arduous post, which he appears to fill completely enough in the manner of the patriarchs of old. In appearance indeed, with his well-marked *Najdi* features ending in a trim, rectangular beard, he might have stepped out of some bas-relief of the ancient Assyrians. In manner he was always grave, meticulously correct in all matters of official or religious ceremonial, austere cordial and decisive.

He was sitting, at the moment of our arrival at his door, in the latticed bow-window of an unpretentious half-basement house on the north side of the main street of Anbariya. Descending a few steps into the dark hall a few feet below the street level, we remounted by more steps to a yet more gloomy anteroom, where shoes were shed before we entered the audience-chamber and, after the usual greetings, took our places on the cushioned window-seat amid other visitors and henchmen present in rows round the room. More greetings of

Our Arrival

pure formality were followed by the equally formal coffee. Whereupon the *Amir*: "Will somebody now tell me who these folk are?" That at least was direct and informal enough, and I began to explain who we were—the *Amir* half rose as if to embrace me as I did so, but relapsed into his attitude of courteous attention—and why we had come. When I had done the *Amir* spoke from his heart graciously. Would that he had known that I was to visit him that he might have prepared worthy hospitality for one who merited consideration on three accounts. First, though he knew me not, he knew of me as an old friend of the Arabs in other days when there was a barrier of religion between us discouraging to intercourse though between friends. Secondly, that barrier had now disappeared, and I could be welcomed as a friend, nay a brother, without let or hindrance. And thirdly, I was thrice welcome as one whose friendship with that man (he referred to the King) was well known over the length and breadth of Arabia—and the King's friends had but to command at Madina while he governed there in the King's name, a dutiful and loyal servant by the grace of God.

The rest of this preliminary interview, during which tea and coffee were served at intervals, and finally fragrant incense, which the *Amir* produced out of his own pocket to lay on the glowing charcoal of the censer brought to him by a servant, was occupied in discussions regarding the most suitable place for our residence during our sojourn. The *Khazna*, formerly the treasury of the *Haram* and now the official guest-house, was not available as it was already occupied by the Afghan Minister at Cairo; but there was a house next door to the *Amir's* and another outside the city walls in a palm-garden, between which we could choose after inspection of both as soon as we had accommodated the wireless lorry in the grounds of the Wireless Station about a mile outside the *Bab al Sham* on the north road. We accordingly took our leave of the *Amir*, promising to return at the second hour (after sunset) for dinner.

Having as rapidly as possible disposed of the wireless lorry and made the acquaintance of Yahya Bey, the Turco-Syrian

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

Director of Posts and Telegraphs—who kindly arranged for me to have a bath and change my clothes in one of the many empty chambers of the huge Wireless Station building, and who also served us with some light food and tea—we returned city-wards on our tour of inspection of the rival lodgings. In fact, we only visited and immediately decided in favour of one of them; the *Firuziya* garden and house just outside the walls between the *Sham* and *Basri* (named after Basri Pasha, a former Turkish Governor of Madina) gates proved too attractive to admit of any hope that the other suggested house (inside the town and gardenless) might be better. To put an end to all argument, we promptly took possession, unloaded our baggage from the cars and disposed of it in the various rooms according to the allocation rapidly made to the various sections of our party. Kordi and I with Fakhri secured for ourselves a great open pillared saloon facing a spacious masonry tank through which (after previous passage through the kitchen and bathroom) the water of the garden well passed out to irrigate a considerable area of palms. The house proper, of three storeys, adjoined this saloon on the west side and we had the whole of the ground floor—the rooms being allotted to the *Najdi* escort-men and the chauffeurs of the party respectively, while we kept one adjoining the tank for our personal baggage. The family (or as it seemed, several families) of the owner of the garden or the gardener in charge or, perhaps, other tenants remained confined to the upper parts of the mansion, where they could often be heard and seldom seen except for the children, of whom there were quite a number, who frequently ventured into our preserves. It took us but a few minutes to settle down—seats and cushions appeared as if by magic—and we soon went off to dine with the *Amir*, a simple dinner of rice and mutton and sour milk in the proper *Najdi* style, before returning for our first night's rest in the City of the Prophet, whose sepulchre I had decided to defer visiting till the morrow that I might be fresh for the undertaking.

There is something of simple but effective efficiency in the organization of a place like Madina. Everything seems to fall into its proper slot or groove at the word “Go.” I have already

The City of the Prophet

remarked on the speed at which the bare spaces of our lodging took on the semblance of comfortable living-rooms. A staff of (not very efficient but well-meaning) servants was at our disposal in a trice. Tea and coffee were immediately forthcoming, and we were inundated with suggestions for the increase of our comfort, while, before I had made any inquiries at all on the subject, my *Muzawwir* or conductor of visitations, Shaikh Ahmad al Junaini, stood before me inquiring when I would visit the Prophet. Our travel-soiled clothes disappeared to the wash, and a tailor appeared to increase the contents of Kordi's wardrobe. Everything seemed to do itself, and it was only gradually that I came to realize afterwards that the genius presiding over our comfort was one Asad Effendi, the local director of Government hospitality, an urbane, smiling man of less than middle age whose most remarkable point was the possession of three thumbs in addition to the ordinary number of other manual digits. He had twin thumbs on his right hand, the one growing at an angle of thirty degrees from near the base of the other, which appeared to be normally placed and shaped. The extra thumb was also of perfect shape with knuckle and nail complete though rather smaller than its twin and to all appearances of no practical utility. I should explain that Kordi was the Egyptian engineer who had been engaged by the Marconi Company to erect the wireless installations at Mecca and Madina. Fakhri, also mentioned above, was his secretary.

II. THE CITY OF THE PROPHET

MADINA, like Gaul, is divided into three parts—the city, the camp and the annexe. The whole of this area is enclosed by an outer girdle of wall, forming a rough oval oriented approximately to the cardinal points of the compass with an extreme length of about 2,200 paces (say about 1,676 metres) from west to east and a width of about half that distance from south to north at the broadest part of the enclosed area. Incidentally Burton in his map of 1854 shows a length and breadth of 1,287

"The City Illumined"—Madina

and 823 paces respectively and makes the Anbariya quarter very much smaller than its present (largely ruinous) area. Eldon Rutter in 1926 made the dimensions 1,707 and 1,173 paces respectively, but shows an uncharted ruin field to the west of Anbariya, which doubtless accounts for our differences. The growth and subsequent decadence of this quarter clearly dated from after Burton's time. The north-south axis roughly bisects the town into two equal parts, of which the western is almost wholly occupied by the annexe or Anbariya quarter, on whose south-western extremity impinges the railway station and its spacious ancillary yard consisting of workshops and other requisite accommodation. The railway line from here skirts the western boundary wall on its northward way, while the eastern limit of the Anbariya quarter is formed by the well-marked torrent-bed of Abu Jida. On the south, both inside and outside the wall, which is here rather dilapidated and indefinite, are straggling gardens and palm-groves, together with a miserable little suburban hamlet called Misr (i.e. Egypt!). On the northern side the partly ruinous walls of the Anbariya quarter and a number of straggling but now abandoned groups of houses outside them look out upon the rocky desert through which runs the Abu Jida channel on its way to join the main drainage line of Wadi al 'Aqiq. The railway precincts are, of course, quite modern, dating from the first decade of the present century, like the spacious Turkish barracks and the not inelegant Egyptian charitable institution facing them across the main street leading from the station to the city. The rest of the Anbariya area forms, as it were, an automatic gauge of the ebb and flow of prosperity. At the time of my visit its generally ruinous state behind the still respectable frontages of the main street on both sides proclaimed a lamentable state of affairs. The former population of Madina, about 80,000 souls or thereabouts, had through war and neglect dwindled to a bare 15,000 and had even been a good deal below that paltry figure. Nothing can indeed revive the old state of affairs but the restoration of the railway, and that still seems a distant prospect despite the occasional conferences that meet to discuss the matter and separate to forget it and the sense of guilt it en-

The City of the Prophet

genders. Meanwhile the Anbariya quarter remains in ruins, and the poorer sort of *Badawin* spread their miserable tabernacles in the shelter of its broken mansions in hope of the pilgrims' charity. Even the pilgrims had begun at the time of my visit to dwindle in numbers owing to a world-wide slump in values, which inevitably struck first and hardest at the agricultural workers of the East—the chief patrons of the pilgrimage.

The main street leads eastwards past a group of mansions on the left forming the residence of the *Wahhabi* governor and his family. Beyond these houses we reach the Abu Jida bridge across the torrent-channel of that name to pass into the camp area called Al Manakha. Here it is that the Prophet's visitors disembarked from their camel-litters in the days when the camel knew no competition from the railway or the still more recent motor-car. And still, in spite of the motor-car if only because of the high fares exacted from those who would ride in such comfort, large numbers come in the old way by camel to camp in the vast oval arena of Al Manakha, or in the houses and hostels which have grown up round it to accommodate the visitors under cover from the elements. This quarter occupies roughly the southern half of the eastern section of the Madina enclosure, and is bounded on one side by the Abu Jida torrent and a thick band of houses lining its right bank. On the other side of the camping space a less compact array of buildings squeezes itself in between Manakha and the city proper, a part of whose circuit wall, formerly completely enclosing it, has been dismantled to make way for the broad street called 'Ainiya, a new commercial thoroughfare leading from the pilgrims' camp into the *Haram* area. The rest of the city wall on this side is intact and its former main entrance, the Egyptian Gate or *Bab al Masri*, survives in all its pristine beauty of towers and bastions and with its narrow winding avenue of shops leading straight to the chief gate of the Prophet's mosque, the *Bab al Salam*. Near the Abu Jida bridge, on the Manakha side of the torrent channel, stands the Turkish pile of Government House with the mosque of Bilal, the Prophet's own *muadhhdhin*, in its precincts. Nearby is another larger mos-

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

que, known as Masjid al Ghamama, while between the two the Khuraiji family of *Najdi* origin, but long and profitably concerned with Madina trade, was in 1931 contemplating and by 1935 had almost completed the construction of a worthy palace, than which there is no finer residential building in Madina. Somewhat behind these last-mentioned buildings stands an attractive bungalow building with palms and other trees to grace its compound—the office of the chief of police, at that time a very charming official named Khalid. In front of this and in the midst of a confused area of market booths—roughly speaking a market for the purveying of country produce such as fruit, vegetables, meat, etc.—stands a monument of Turkish respect for sanitary canons, a circular public convenience with a roof of corrugated iron. And, facing the police-office across this sign of progress, stands the Town Hall, the centre of all municipal activities and the seat of the mayor, a very charming and courteous old gentleman with whom, then, and again on my second visit in 1935, I often had the pleasure of discussing the affairs of his famous city. At the north-west end of the Manakha area is another building devoted to police activities and adorned with a small grove of palms, while a little beyond that is the gate known as *Bab al Saghir*, or little gate, surmounted by the post and telegraph office. This building strictly speaking belongs to the city proper, which here thrusts out a narrow corridor between the little gate and the Damascus Gate (*Bab al Sham*) to the great fort of *Qal' at al Sa'idi* on a slight eminence dominating the Manakha quarter on one side and the flank of the great north road on the other.

The core of Madina is, of course, the city, walled all about—with the trivial break above-mentioned—and occupying the northern half, slightly tilted from N.W. to S.E., of the eastern section of the enclosed area. In fact the northern wall of the city forms part of the greater circuit which is continued from its eastern and western extremities near the Baqi'a cemetery and the Sa'idi fort respectively. As already noted, the southern wall of the city proper runs between these points along the northern fringe of the Manakha section—the city area being somewhat lozenge-shaped. Its central feature, not far from its

The City of the Prophet

eastern extremity, is naturally the Prophet's mosque, which certainly, though greatly enlarged since those days, covers the ground actually occupied by Muhammad and his most intimate companions and relations on their first arrival at Madina in June, A.D. 622. That the site was inhabited at the time is certain, as the Prophet's party was hospitably received and entertained by the people of the town; and it is therefore in this eastern section of the city area that we must locate what was then probably little more than a fair-sized village, of which almost certainly no single building has survived to our time. It is impossible to picture the appearance of the place thirteen centuries ago and, in spite of all the literature lavished on the subject, it is idle to speculate on the route followed by the Prophet's camel to the spot where the mosque now stands or on the arrangement of the dwellings that stood in the neighbourhood. A small palm-grove certainly faced a part of the large open space subsequently built over, while another section of it was apparently occupied by a cemetery. The lava blocks which constitute the bulk of the material used for construction purposes in this part of the city create the impression of great antiquity but the earliest date actually recorded on any building—and quite a number of them are so dated—was, so far as I could ascertain, the year A.H. 706, equivalent to A.D. 1306. This was, as the inscription declared, a *Waqf* hostel reserved for the accommodation of men only. Near the *Hammam Gate*, however, giving entrance to the city from the *Nakhawila*, or *Shia'*, quarter (an easterly continuation of the Manakha area), I noticed a deep excavation in connection with the subterranean water supply, which exposed the actual base of the city wall at a depth of about twenty feet below the present street level of the *Darb al Janaiz* or Funeral Road. The present top of the wall at this point is some thirty feet or more above the road, and it would seem to have been raised progressively at intervals to counteract any loss of strategic efficiency due to the rising ground-level. It is scarcely likely that the original foundations of the wall were laid as much as twenty feet below the surface and it would be interesting, if possible, to calculate the length of time required to raise the general surface of the city floor,

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

say, fifteen feet. In Wadi Na'man, near Mecca, the aqueduct of Queen Zubaida has been covered to a depth of 100 feet in 1,000 years, if the height of the original manholes can be taken as a safe guide, but there we have to do with a sandy valley subject to copious seasonal floods, and it is obvious that the rise of the surface at Madina has been at a palpably slower rate. The original mosque, built under the direction of the Prophet, appears to have had mud walls superimposed on foundations, and a thin lower course of basalt masonry and, if that was the custom of the local builders of the time, it is probable that nothing then visible above the surface remains visible to-day. Excavation would, however, in all probability expose foundations antedating or contemporary with the Prophet and the early Califs, but the oldest existing buildings, in so far as they are visible above ground, can only date back to a later period of medieval times. Besides the dated house already mentioned, there is one in the *Saha* street which is attributed to the time of the Mameluke prince of Egypt, Qaïd Bey, who flourished during the last half of the fifteenth century A.D. There are also in the same street, near the High Court building and the residence of the Chief Justice, two buildings still known by their old Jewish names—*Dar al Juna* and *Dar al Mabsama*—though it is unlikely that in their present form they date back much before the Middle Ages. And doubtless other buildings still in use hark back to medieval times, though not to the hey-day of the Califs of Madina.

The *Haram* or Prophet's Mosque, as it now is, is less than a century old, for it was completely rebuilt by order of Sultan 'Abdul Majid after the destruction of the mosque of those days by fire. The material, a lovely pinkish rock of crystalline formation, was quarried from the Jamma'wat range bordering the left bank of Wadi 'Aqiq to the south-west of the town. At the same time, presumably, the faïence decoration of the south wall was introduced as well as the elaborate inlay work of the pillars of the *Raudha* and other parts. Thus reconstructed on a uniform plan to the artist's design, the mosque stands out as the chief architectural feature not only of Madina but of all Arabia, and despite some overcrowding of buildings round the

The City of the Prophet

southern side of the building it has the merit of being visible from several points outside. Of late years the mosque had fallen into a state of disrepair owing partly to neglect and partly to dearth of funds, but since 1934 this matter has been taken in hand at the instance and expense of Tal'at Harb, the chief director of the Bank Misr of Egypt, and when I visited Madina in 1935 work was actively proceeding both on the various minarets and on the interior, which at the moment looked more like a mason's yard and carpenter-shop than a place of worship. I have not seen it since,¹ but doubtless the new marble flooring is now in place as also the splendid wooden lattice which was to replace the rather tawdry screen that formerly separated the "Cage" or women's section from the rest of the mosque. In 1935, the women, debarred from their special part of the mosque occupying the whole length of the eastern colonnade, had to make the best of praying in public, as of course they always do at Mecca. It would indeed be interesting to know how the custom of secluding the women arose at Madina, and it is also interesting to note that they can only enter the famous *Baqi'a* cemetery to be buried. Alive, they are debarred from making visitations, which for men are an established part of the Madina ceremonial programme and include, of course, visits to the tombs of such ladies as have a recognized niche in Islamic history. For women, the practice is to stand in a small cemetery outside the *Baqi'a* limits but overlooking them and thence to make the customary salutations. The whole question of tomb-visitation was, of course, very much in the forefront of Muslim controversy during the early days of the *Wahhabi* regime; but the problem seems to have solved itself *ambulando* on common-sense lines. Policemen are on duty both in the *Haram* and in the cemetery to check any attempt at exaggerated manifestations before the tombs of the great, while the much-criticized destruction by the *Wahhabis* in 1925 and 1926 of all cupolas, domes and other questionable embellishments of the graves of the departed appears to have had a psychological effect which was scarcely to be expected.

¹ I visited Madina again in 1938, by which time great progress had been made in this work, though it had not been completed.

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

The identity of the more famous tombs—perhaps a score or more of them—is known to the guides, but the tombs themselves, when I saw them in 1931, looked so wretched and piteous in their ruinous state that it is difficult to imagine them attracting visitors but for the visitations being, as it were, part of the prescribed programme. Three years later, however, the visit of the Finance Minister, 'Abdullah al Sulaiman, to Madina seems to have resulted in the tidying up of the ruinous heaps and, at my next visit, all the historic tombs at any rate had been provided with simple but neat headstones and borders of basalt blocks. There is certainly now nothing in the *Baqi'a* cemetery calculated to lead one astray in the direction of saint or hero worship; and it may be that some day the neglect of the customary visitations by the pilgrims will have the unfortunate result of obliterating the memory of the historical facts committed to these graves. The case is, of course, very different with the few famous graves in the *Haram* itself, where at all times, especially in the season of the pilgrimage, the custodians of ecclesiastical propriety have their work cut out to keep visitors on the move and to prevent excessive demonstrations on their part before the handsome iron grilles which conceal the actual graves of the Prophet himself and his two immediate successors. It is said, though I know not the truth of the matter, that the *Bohra* (*Shia'*) community of India offered Ibn Sa'ud £50,000 to spare the grave of Fatima bint al Asad, mother of the Calif 'Ali. But the bribe, if ever offered, failed of its purpose and the ruined tomb, actually situated immediately outside the cemetery limits on the Najd road, is the prey of the camel-thorn growing in the soil of its debris. The graves of greatest historical interest in *Baqi'a* are perhaps those of the Calif 'Uthman, murdered at the door of his house facing the mosque from the east, and of the Imam Malik, one of the four great divines of orthodox *Islam*. The most pathetic of the monuments are those that respectively contain the remains of the nine wives and three daughters of the Prophet who gave up the ghost in Madina. There is also a tomb, once decked out in all the magnificence of a domed shrine, said to be Fatima's, but it seems doubtful whether she was in fact buried in *Baqi'a*

The Visitation

or in the *Haram* by her father's side. The Prophet's aunts were buried not in *Baqi'a* but in the little burial ground on the other side of the Najd road, already mentioned as the scene of visitations by women. Visitors making the round of the *Baqi'a* tombs repeat the formula of salutation appropriate in each case after the guide and then recite the *Fatiha* or opening chapter of the *Quran*.

III. THE VISITATION

ON the morning after my arrival at Madina Shaikh Ahmad al Junaini, a professional pilgrim-guide who had placed himself at my disposal for the period of my visit and was duly rewarded for his services, came to conduct me to the mosque for the prescribed ceremony of the visitation of the Prophet. We entered the mosque by the *Bab al Salam* (or gate of salvation) and threaded our way through the stately pillared hall, which occupies the whole of the southern part of the building—about one-third of the whole enclosure—to the *Raudha*. Differentiated and distinguished from the rest of the pillared area by the marble casing of its columns, this section of the mosque occupies the site of the small grove of palms over against the dwelling-place of the Prophet, on its east side, which was used for the purpose of prayer from the beginning of his ministry at Madina and was in due course converted into a mosque. The palms were cut down and made into pillars to support a simple roof of fronds and rafters, sheltering the worshippers from the summer sun and the winter rains. Each pillar presumably represents an original palm-trunk, and the whole area of the "garden" prayer-place forms but a small part of the huge mosque of to-day. In the Prophet's day it was doubtless large enough to accommodate the whole congregation of local Muslims. In it he led the prayers, and by it he lived in the house in which, when he died, he was buried. Hence the peculiar sanctity of the spot and the established custom requiring the Prophet's visitors to make their first prayers within its limits. The short prayer of visitation completed, we sat awhile contemplating the scene,

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

and then rose to pass out of the *Raudha* near the Prophet's *Mihrab*, after which, turning to the left, we visited in turn the Prophet and his two chief companions and successive successors and his daughter, Fatima. Each compartment stands behind a grille of ironwork, before which the visitor delivers his address of greeting in the appropriate traditional terms dictated by the guide. Then one repairs to the spot where the angel Gabriel is reputed to have appeared to the Prophet, a wall with a Meccaward niche just beyond and opposite the three “houses.” Here a blessing is invoked in the traditional formula on one's own visitation and, this being now complete, one leaves the mosque by the Women's Gate, so called apparently as it confronted the apartments of the Prophet's wives on the other side of the alley running down the whole length of the eastern side of the mosque. Here too is 'Uthman's house in the same row, near to which a latticed partition gives entrance to what was once a garden—perhaps the garden of Fatima though now bearing little resemblance to one. At the further end of this “close” stands the famous library of the Shaikh al Islam 'Arif Hikmat, the repository of many hundreds of rare, unique and priceless manuscripts. The Keeper of this library, whose chief feature is a most attractive circular reading-room with the precious books laid (not stood) in piles on the surrounding shelves, is a charming old scholar known as Shaikh Ibrahim ibn Ahmad Hamdizada al Kharputi, of Anatolian origin, whose grandfather settled here in A.H. 1255 (A.D. 1839). He showed me some of his treasures, and my only regret was that, on both occasions of my visiting Madina, lack of time and other claims on my attention prevented me from making as much use of the library as I should have liked. Among the gems of the collection were:

- a. A perfect copy dated A.H. 395 (A.D. 1005) of a work entitled *Kitab al Awail* by Imam Hilal ibn Hasan al 'Askari. A copy of this MS. was made in 1930 by Shaikh Ibrahim himself for the late Sanusi leader, Saiyid Ahmad, during the latter's sojourn at Madina as an exile from Libya. There are no other copies of this work in existence.

The Visitation

- b. A copy dated A.H. 466 (A.D.1073) of the *Kitab al Tashbihat* by Abu Ishaq al Baghdadi.
- c. An undated copy of a geographical work called *Dhikr al Masafat wa Suwar al Aqalim* composed in A.H. 309 (A.D. 921) by Ahmad ibn Sahl al Balkhi as the result of his far eastern travels.
- d. An old but undated (believed to be of the fourth or fifth century of the *Hijra*) copy of *Tabaqat al Shu'ara* by Muhammad ibn al Salam al Jumahi—apparently the only known copy of this work.
- e. A single volume containing the whole of Bukhari's *Sahih* (traditions of the Prophet) in a beautiful hand dated A.H. 1167 (A.D. 1753).
- f. A MS. dated A.H. 1220 (A.D. 1805) of al Ghazzali's *Ihya al 'ulum* by a scribe named Muhammad al Mukhlis al Dhihni.

These are but a few of the glories of the library, shown to me almost at random by Shaikh Ibrahim, and I have thought it well to give these details in case they may catch the eye of some scholar competent to appreciate them. Shaikh Ibrahim has long been engaged on his own account in a study of alphabets. He showed me in 1935, when I visited his house in the street called *Saha*, a voluminous MS. collection of essays on the various systems of lettering he has succeeded in running to earth in the course of his explorations. The alphabets of Adam and Seth (Shith in Arabic) took natural precedence among them for obvious chronological reasons. I should have liked to spend some time examining this work in greater detail, but our privacy was disturbed by an irruption of visitors, and the conversation turned to the subject of gold-mines. Saiyid Hasan 'Amran, a man of enlightened views who lives in a charming country house on the lava slopes abutting on the western extremity of the station yard, and Ahmad Fahkri, employed in a clerical capacity by Mr K. S. Twitchell, of the Sa'udi Arabian Mining Syndicate, were the newcomers. The latter had just got back to Madina with Mr Van de Poll (a well-known Dutch Muslim, who has lived in the Hijaz on and off since 1913, and

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

was till a few years ago the head of a firm bearing his own name at Jidda) from an expedition for the purpose of marking out a route to the Cradle of Gold (Mahd al Dhahab), an old mine recently discovered by Twitchell about halfway between Madina and 'Ashaira. The new track as marked out by Mr Van de Poll leaves the main Jidda-Madina road in the valley of Bir Darwish, and, fetching a wide circuit by way of Hafira station on the Hijaz railway and the Abal Dud well in the valley of Umm Salama, rejoins the Madina-Hail track a little to the east of Mashhad—the first point at which pilgrims coming by this route can see the green dome and spires of the Prophet's mosque.

Van de Poll at this time (February, 1935) was the tenant of a charming house and garden in the narrow western part of the city proper between the two gates. It is a *Waqf* property known as the *Sultaniya* from the circumstance that it is entailed in perpetuity (together with a row of houses fringing its eastern side) in favour of the pensioned concubines of a recent Sultan of Turkey. Here Van de Poll, paying a small rent of about £10 per annum and spending about as much again on the upkeep of the garden, lived in pleasant Arab style with his myrmidons and a formidable array of coffee-pots spread out in a summer house by the side of a channel of well-water tenanted by great numbers of frogs. He had recently visited both Mahd al Dhahab and another mine called Ma'dan al 'Aqiq, and spoke of them as having apparently been abandoned owing to waterlogging! At neither place is there any water now but the neighbourhood includes the wells of Juraisiya, Minya and Rai'an. The concession granted to the Sa'udi Arabian Mining Syndicate was actually signed on 23rd December, 1934, and comprised an area roughly coterminous with the Hijaz—a length of about 800 miles from north to south and, on the average, about 100 miles in width. The sacred territories of Mecca and Madina are, of course, excluded from the operation of the concession. It is, perhaps, premature¹ to speak of the rediscovery of “King Solomon's Mines,” but gold has

¹ The Mahd al Dhahab mine has now for some years been operating with considerable success, as I saw when I visited it in 1938.

The Visitation

been known as an asset of Arabia since the third millennium B.C. and it would be astonishing if the tribute of its tribes to ancient Babylonia, the supposed operations of Solomon and the later activities of the early Califs should prove to have extracted for human use all that Nature in distant ages had stored away in the rocks of the desert.

Another old friend, residing at Madina in 1931 and occupying a large house and palm-grove abutting on the *Firuziyya* garden, was Dr Muhammad Husain, a retired Indian medical officer, who first came to Jidda as Consulate doctor and vice-consul in 1895, and on frequent occasions up to his retirement acted as British consul during the absence on leave of the actual incumbents of the post. At the time of his arrival Jidda had been through a serious crisis resulting in the murder of his predecessor (the Indian vice-consul) and the Russian consul by a band of *Badawin* as they sat taking the air with a number of other consuls, on the ridge overlooking the lagoon by the Madina gate. The doctor, an intelligent repository of much information about the days of Sharif 'Aun and his successors, had taken up his residence at Madina soon after his retirement from the service, and was now engaged on medical work among the neighbours and visitors of the Prophet on an entirely charitable basis and at considerable expense to himself. He had thus become a very popular institution in the city, and there was nothing he enjoyed more than to settle down with his visitors and think aloud about his varied experiences. He was a highly critical observer with a sharp, though far from vicious, tongue, and he was perhaps inclined to forget that the standards of administrative efficiency to which his long service had accustomed him were scarcely to be expected in a country which had for centuries adapted itself to the Turkish system—a chaos of muddling and corrupt inefficiency, illuminated at times by the brilliance of individual governors.

Perhaps no man here knew more about the Turkish system from inside than Yahya Bey, the present head of the postal and telegraph department at Madina. Undeterred by the prevalent fashions he still maintains in perfect running order and regularly uses an old "T"-model Ford touring-car bearing the

"The City Illumined"—Madina

number 4729098. It is the only surviving specimen of that model in Arabia, as the Government in 1929 or 1930 refused to license these vehicles for the carriage of pilgrims. Yahya was an inveterate yarn-spinner and had an uncommonly rich fund of stories at his finger-tips. We were talking one day of carpets and deploring the decay of modern taste in such matters. The conversation reminded him of a case which he had under investigation at that moment. Some months or weeks before a registered packet containing £50 in Turkish notes had been despatched from Madina to Istanbul, and quite recently it had been returned intact with the intimation that the addressee had died before its arrival. The sender was summoned to receive back his letter, and it was only then discovered that, though the packet was apparently intact, it no longer contained the notes. The seals had not been tampered with and Yahya was completely nonplussed. Not so a Turkish governor of the good old days, to whom one came complaining that a bag of gold consigned to him through the registered post—as is still the custom in Arabia—had been found to contain nothing but copper coins. A minute examination of the packet failed to reveal any signs of tampering with its seals, seams or fabric. The complainant was told to come back in a day or two, but that very night the governor had the misfortune to spoil his most valued carpet. Somehow or other he had gashed it with a sharp instrument, and next day the sad news was all over the town. People poured in to sympathize with their ruler and one man, more practical than the rest, brought along with him a craftsman noted for more than ordinary skill in the repairing of carpets. His invisible darning was famous in the trade, and to him the Pasha, with every appearance of scepticism, handed over his precious rug. In due course the man came back. The Pasha's carpet was as if it had never been damaged, and everybody was delighted at the happy issue of the tragedy. "Now tell me," said the Pasha, "who was it that brought you that bag of coins the other day to sew up?" So the culprit was betrayed and the gold coins returned to their rightful owner.

IV. LIFE IN MADINA

CLOSE by the *Haram* on the west side, near *Bab al Salam*, is a paved market-square known as *Al 'Ainiya* from the presence of the administrative seat of the committee charged with the supervision of the city's water-supply, whose most important source is the subterranean '*Ain al Zarqa* aqueduct, linking a prolific spring in the Quba district with the city and ending just outside the Damascus Gate near the ruins of the Zaki al Din mosque. Formerly a fairly extensive garden of palms extended from the '*Ainiya* square to the gate of the same name, forming an attractive promenade for the leisure hours of the citizens. The need for extra shop-space, however, resulted not long since in the conversion of the garden into a broad commercial thoroughfare with shops set back behind roofed verandas or arcades on either side. The disappearance of the gate here and of a section of the wall on either side has not only given direct and easy access from the Manakha to the *Haram* area, but provides one of the most charming views at a distance of the Green Dome and its attendant minaret. Near the wall end of this street stand the new offices of the Khuraiji brothers, whose very old father was still alive in 1935—though very decrepit—and who have flourished by a combination of ordinary commercial activities with a good deal of Government agency-work since the advent of the *Wahhabi* regime. I have already mentioned the new mansion which they had almost completed near Government House at the time of my second visit. And it was one of these brothers who had entertained me at Rabigh on the occasion of my landing there in 1925, when they were playing an important part in maintaining a steady flow of supplies for the invading *Wahhabi* army.

From the same '*Ainiya* square the broad *Saha* street leads off in a north-westerly direction to the Damascus Gate. In it are most of the best mansions of the city, though the Khuraijis have their huge—externally prison-like but internally palatial—private residence in the eastern quarter near the *Hammam* Gate. My friend the librarian had a fine house in the *Saha*,

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

while a still larger mansion near by was being prepared for occupation by the Begum of Bhopal in February, 1935. The Nawab of Bahawalpur was also being expected at this time and was to be accommodated in the house of Saiyid 'Amran—I am not sure in what locality, but possibly in the villa outside the station-yard. The first-mentioned house was the property of one Ibrahim Hashim, a connection by marriage of my then hosts, the family of Saiyid Hamza Ghauth, who have a residence opposite Government House on the right bank of Abu Jida. Saiyid Hamza himself was at this time on a mission to 'Iraq in connection with the establishment of a motor-route across the desert from Najaf *via* Haïl to Madina. I met him later, on his completion of this task, in the King's camp at Al Khafs near Riyadh, when he had resumed his normal post on the King's staff. At one time, during the war, he served with Sa'ud ibn Rashid at Haïl, and frequently acted for him on missions to the Turkish headquarters at Damascus. On one such occasion, when he was returning to Haïl with a caravan-load of arms, money and supplies, he appears to have had a brush with Lawrence's men, who more circumstantially than truthfully reported his death and the capture of the whole caravan. Some time later I first met him at Baghdad, whither he came on behalf of 'Abdullah ibn Mit'ab, the successor of Sa'ud, to be received with open arms by Gertrude Bell. But then, alas! the fate of Haïl was all but sealed, and it was in the train of Ibn Sa'ud that I next saw Hamza—I think in 1930, at Taïf. Since then we have ever been close friends, and it was his sons, 'Abdul Qadir and Nasir, who entertained me during my short sojourn at Madina in 1935. Nasir was just then on the point of leaving for Italy to be trained as an aviator with a dozen other youngsters from Arabia, but he and four or five of the others were sent back from Massawa', where the whole party had been subjected to certain preliminary tests designed to reveal their probable capacity for aerial activities. He is now in the employ of the gold-diggers, while his elder brother carries on business in a small way on the local exchange and, in addition, keeps a little retail shop outside the Egyptian Gate.

Inevitably, the great families of Madina have suffered from

Life in Madina

the recent decadence of their city. Already their sufferings have nearly extended over a generation, and there is ample evidence that they have drawn in their horns and tightened their belts to meet the strain of hard times. Yet there is an urbanity among these patricians, as in the merchant-princes of 'Anaiza and Rass, due perhaps to the fact that, however much the frowns of fortune may force some measure of abstinence from foreign luxuries, the rich gardens of Madina always supply enough and abundantly to spare of the actual necessities of life, not only for the wealthy, but also for the impoverished hosts which share with them the honour of being neighbours of the Prophet. Those were indeed great days when the railway carried off the superabundance of the oasis produce to the far north and brought back in exchange the grain of Hauran and the piece-goods of Manchester and the pilgrims of the north. Such days will come again. Meanwhile one can, in the season, buy a large basket of luscious fruit and wholesome vegetables for but a few pence. Formerly, the agricultural activity of Madina was astonishing, and most of the better properties were irrigated from the bountiful wells by machine-driven pumps, fed by the cheap wood-fuel abundantly obtainable in the neighbourhood at the cost of its carriage. The high import-taxes on kerosene have rather discouraged the use of oil-burning engines—a minor tragedy in its way, though its effect will not be palpable perhaps till long hence. The use of wood-fuel, like the consumption of goats' milk, means deforestation in the long run; and Arabia of all countries, with its scanty rainfall and thin crust of soil, can ill afford such a luxury.

Meanwhile the life of Madina centres on its gardens and palm-groves, and its inhabitants are never so happy as when they foregather, in small parties of friends with an occasional visitor from outside, for a picnic in one or another of its numerous gardens. Some of these are to be found actually within the circuit-wall, in which case the owners are generally in permanent residence in spacious mansions, set in the midst of palms and other foliage with a pillared *diwan* or reception-chamber mirrored in a large square masonry tank, through which the well-water is led on its way to irrigate the fruit-

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

trees, palms and subsidiary crops, like lucerne, which always has a ready market owing to the frequent influx of *Badawin* with their camels. Outside the walls there is a deep fringe of palm-groves encircling the old city from the Quba gate on the south side to the Damascus Gate on the north. Country-houses, similar to those already described within the walls, have been built in many of these gardens, a large area of which has however been cleared of trees in comparatively recent times to make way for an extensive suburb running from the neighbourhood of the *Majidi* and *Basri* gates along the two roads leading respectively northwards to Sidi Hamza and north-eastwards towards Najd. This suburb in effect forms a fourth section of the Madina town area and was, during the reign of King Husain, protected from external dangers by a new wall running from the north extremity of the Wireless Station enclosure (about a mile north of the Damascus Gate) to a point near the *Baqi'a* cemetery. The two roads already mentioned pass through this outer wall by the unpretentious gates called *Bab Hamza* and *Bab al Tammar* (or *Bab al Sadaqa*) respectively. Within this wall there is a considerable area of salty land, showing signs of not very successful attempts at cultivation, but the actual palm-groves seem to be flourishing enough while the houses of the suburb were conceived on the grand scale—large well-built hostels for pilgrims and dwelling-houses for those who find the city precincts unduly cramped. Unfortunately, however, the falling off of the pilgrim traffic has tended to accentuate the misery begun by the great war and confirmed by the subsequent abandonment of all attempts to restore the Hijaz Railway. So the fine mansions of the *Majidi* quarter are steadily deteriorating as they stand empty and neglected—a burden without profit to their owners, a reproach to two Great Powers which have divided up the spoils of the railway among themselves and left the Hijaz to its fate.

The private motor-car is an almost unknown luxury in Madina. The governor has his fleet of vehicles and, in consequence thereof, had greatly improved and marked out the tracks leading south to Quba and north to Sidi Hamza. Yahya Bey, as already noted, had his Ford of ancient type, while the

The Oasis of Madina

Khuraijis and Nasir ibn 'Aqil, the local treasurer, had their cars. In the pilgrim-season, of course, there are many cars available for excursions during the time they remain here to carry back to Mecca or Jidda the pilgrims they bring up. But the ordinary citizens of Madina, even the well-to-do, have long developed a routine of picnics to the outlying palm-grounds and places of interest, for which they ordinarily ride donkeys or, in a few cases, even horses or camels. The general state of economic depression of late years has not encouraged them to discard the steeds of old for the new-fangled vehicles. Excursions to the country are therefore elaborate matters calling for serious preparation, and it is thus that such visits are generally confined to certain seasons, when a household moves to some distant palm-ground either belonging to it or leased from the agent of an absent owner and settles down there for a month or two. During this time they are frequently visited by the less fortunate spirits who are detained in town by business or for other reasons, while the head of the family or other male members, having occasional business to attend to, go off similarly to town for a day or two or a week-end. The living quarters in these outlying properties are simple but adequate, with separate accommodation for each section of a family, but the chief feature of all of them is something in the nature of a summer-house in the neighbourhood of an irrigation runnel or a more elaborate tank, by the side of which the men of the family and their guests while away the hours discussing politics or economic problems, praying at the appointed hours, slumbering at the day's heat, and probably in many cases enjoying the charms of music which cannot be indulged in within the sacred precincts themselves.

V. THE OASIS OF MADINA

I VISITED a number of these properties and spent many pleasant hours with my various hosts in such dalliance. They seemed to take a genuine pleasure in showing visitors round the gardens, visiting the wells with their adjacent engine-

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

houses, showing how they have locally converted oil-engines to work on producer-gas generated from wood-fuel in a clumsy and even dangerous-looking retort. Not the least interesting feature in their use of such engines is that, so far from devising or using any kind of silencer, they trust to the noise of the exhaust, sometimes actually adding a sort of whistle to make a more penetrating or distinctive sound, to warn them of mechanical defects. So they sleep soundly to the tune of a shrill exasperating screech, and experience has taught them that there is no more effective disturber of slumbers than the sudden cessation of the noise caused by the stoppage of the engine.

There is no great variety of vegetation in these palm-groves. The dates of Madina are, of course, famous all over the Muslim east both for their essential qualities and their pious associations. Peaches, grapes, apricots and other fruit, according to the season, are abundant and their quality could doubtless be greatly improved by skilful husbandry. Ordinary garden-flowers are not greatly in evidence, though there is an increasing tendency in recent times to grow more of them. The rose and the jasmine are popular and widely cultivated for their scent and the henna-plant is a favourite, sometimes growing to tree-like dimensions and always more useful than ornamental. I was perhaps too early for the migrating birds during my visit of 1935, and the resident ones are not of great variety or special interest. One of the commonest of them is the *Bulbul*, called *Nughri*, whose tuneful note is to be heard at all times and which is the favourite cage-bird of the Hijaz. They can be taught to sing, and a bird so trained fetches high prices at Mecca and Jidda. The Black Robin (*al Mujabbiya*) is in season another songster to be found in the gardens, but they say it cannot be kept in captivity. Bee-eaters are as common as they are beautiful, and the youths of Madina lay traps for the *Qahd* or mountain-partridge, which is said to be plentiful in the neighbouring hills. For the rest, ravens, kites, Egyptian vultures, kestrels, various larks, blackstarts and several species of wheatear are to be found commonly enough in this district. At the time of my 1931 visit Madina was in the throes of a locust invasion, but no great damage was done on this occasion. Inci-

The Oasis of Madina

dentally, the whole of the Madina district from Quba to Jabal Uhud is, like the sacred territory round Mecca, a sanctuary for all wild creatures. No shooting is allowed therein, yet neither birds nor animals are conspicuously plentiful. Of wild animals, the leopard is said to be found in the neighbourhood of Jabal Baidha, where also, as in the surrounding mountains, the ibex is not uncommon and the shy coney plentiful. I saw no trace of gazelle in the immediate precincts of the oasis, but there were a couple roaming tamely about the streets of the city when I was there—brought in by the *Badawin* from the desert and much in demand as household pets.

The Madina district extends by traditional definition from the lava (*al Laba*) to the jungle (*al Ghaba*), the latter being a dense forest of tamarisk bushes at the extreme north end of the oasis in the broad sandy bed of Wadi 'Aqiq, where it turns westward from under the last spur of Jabal Uhud to join the great channel of Wadi Hamdh, whose source was discovered by Doughty in the lava mountains about Khaibar. From this point the oasis extends southward about ten miles to a bay in the lava lying near to and south-east of Quba. This bay forms the apex of an isosceles triangle, whose base lies roughly along the southern foot of Jabal Uhud and is about five miles across. Beyond this base the combined valleys of Wadi 'Aqiq, coming from the south-west, Sha'ib Abu Jida coming from the south through the town area and Wadi Qanat coming from the east along the foot of Jabal Uhud, form a northward rectangular projection about three miles wide. The southern and central sections of the oasis up to the historic "ditch" lie in a basin closed in on west, south and east by a lava flow of some antiquity. North of the ditch the broader part of the district extends from the Jamma'wat range and Wadi 'Aqiq on the west to the prolongation of the lava tract on the east reaching nearly to the foot of Uhud. Numerous farms and plantations dot this area, but the main tract of the northern palm-groves, known collectively as Al 'Uyun, lies along the right bank of Wadi al Qanat under the edge of Uhud up to the confluence of this channel with Wadi 'Aqiq, whereafter a dense tract of palms extends on both sides of the valley to its westward bend. From

“The City Illumined”—Madina

early times the oasis has flourished on a series of subterranean aqueducts fed by springs covered by the lava flow, in addition to which wells have been dug both in the southern basin and in the river valleys.

It was here, at the very foot of Jabal Uhud and astride of the Qanat channel, that lay the old city of the Jews, the famous Yathrib. Separated from the foot of Uhud by a thick band of flourishing palm-groves—dotted with the clay or stone mansions of their owners—the ruins of the premier Jewish settlement of the district, now buried (but not very deeply) in the sand and gravel poured over them by the floods of centuries, can quite easily be traced on both sides of the torrent-channel about a mile or so to the west of Sidi Hamza village. The area it covers is not very extensive, while the walls and houses of the town have been used through the ages as a quarry to supply masonry for the occasional buildings that grow up from time to time in the neighbourhood. The seams made by the operations of such builders expose the original masonry here and there, but otherwise there is little to be found on the surface, over which I have wandered in vain on several occasions. Two querns, made of the local scoriaceous lava, are now in the British Museum, and I have at times seen in the possession of various citizens of Madina a few remnants of household utensils said to have been found in the Jewish villages. This is all that is left to tell of the Jewish occupation of this area, which may well have begun during the early part of the Christian era, when the Jews were expelled from Palestine by Hadrian (A.D. 136). It did not long survive the arrival of Muhammad, whose early years of residence at Madina were marked by the expulsion of two of the Israelite tribes—the Bani Nadhir and Bani Qainuqa—and the extermination of the third, the Bani Quraiza, for its treacherous or equivocal intelligence with the enemy on the occasion of the famous battle of the Ditch. This tribe, whose name alone survives to this day in the Harrat al Quraiza, appears to have occupied the southern extremity of the district, where the ruins of its villages may be seen at 'Awali, Qurban and Quba. At Qurban there is also an *'Itm*, a round heap of stones with a more or less flat top, the exact

The Oasis of Madina

significance of which it is difficult to determine. It is scarcely high enough to have been used as a watch-tower and seems almost too small to have been a building, though it is tempting to think that it was indeed not only a building but the local synagogue. A similar tumulus is also to be seen further north at the edge of the lava-field close to the tomb and mosque of 'Ali al 'Uraidh. This is still known by the name of a Jew, Marhab, perhaps the same that fell during the attack of the Muslims on Khaibar, whither some of the exiled Bani Nadhir appear to have gone after their expulsion from Madina. The present mosque is surrounded by a considerable area of cultivable land and it is obvious that it once had many more wells than the few that are still in use. It is not unlikely, therefore, that this site represents the centre of the Bani Nadhir element which also had representatives residing in the town itself. Yathrib was evidently the home of the third tribe, the Bani Qainuqa, who were less concerned with agriculture than with the metal work for which they had a high reputation. They were affiliated to the Arab Khazraj tribe, who doubtless occupied the rich groves and farms of the northern section of the district, and they are said to have helped the Muslim army on the day of Uhud. They were, however, the first of the Jewish tribes to be expelled from Madina, only narrowly escaping the worse fate that awaited their kinsmen in the south, who, like the Bani Nadhir, enjoyed the patronage and protection of the 'Aus tribe. Thus, while the Bani Nadhir migrated partly to Khaibar to tempt Providence a second time with disastrous results, and the Bani Quraiza remained to be exterminated on the spot in due course, the Qainuqa Jews shook the dust of Arabia from their feet for ever and returned whence they had originally come—to Syria or Palestine. The thirteen centuries that have passed over the scene since those days have been sufficient to obliterate all superficial trace of the Jewish occupation; and the Arabs of to-day do not encourage enthusiasm for the study of the Jewish stratum of Madina history. It will be long before ever the spade sets to work to reveal those buried mysteries, and the visitor to Sidi Hamza seldom realizes that he is almost within a stone's throw of the old Jewish capital.

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

The battle of Uhud was fought in A.D. 625, three years after the Prophet's flight from Mecca, within sight of the Jewish battlements in a wedge-shaped valley descending from a ravine in the heart of the mountain to Wadi Qanat. The Quraish invaders had followed the 'Aqiq valley down to the fertile plain around Yathrib, while the Prophet's force, to meet their threat, had marched up from the town to take up a position astride Wadi Qanat with its right resting on the lower spurs of the Uhud ridge. Two small mosques, known as Masjid al Dir'a and Al Mustarah, halfway between the city and the battlefield, commemorate the spots where the Prophet halted to don his coat of mail and later to rest. Beyond these one enters the palm-groves of the village, which has grown up along the left bank of the Wadi round the spot called Qubbat al Masra where Hamza was killed, and buried after the battle. His present grave, to which he was removed under the 'Abbasid regime, is, however, on the other side of the torrent-bed and was enclosed by a domed shrine until the *Wahhabis* destroyed it in 1925. The grave alone is left to mark the spot, a simple structure of granite blocks, about three feet high with a slightly vaulted top. Nearby are two masonry enclosures containing the remains of the other martyrs of the battle, and another single grave of 'Uqaid ibn abi Numas, a Sharifian governor of Madina in 'Abbasid times who gave special attention to the perpetuation of the memory of Hamza and the battle of Uhud. Close by are the mosque and tank of Al Thanaya, commemorating the spot where the Prophet received a wound in the face, causing the loss of a tooth. The tank is regarded with special veneration and is full of clear deep water from a spring by whose side a bath has been provided for visiting pilgrims. Another tank, formerly fed from an aqueduct but now dry, stands close by, while up the ravine are one or two spots intimately associated by tradition with the events of the battle. One is a small mosque—*Masjid al Tafassuh* or *Ghusl*—where the wounds of the Prophet were washed as he retreated to the narrower upper part of the ravine, and another is a small mosque called *Al Tawaqi*, commemorating the spot on which Muhammad lost the turban swathed round his casque. A third is a small

Jabal Uhud

natural cave about 100 feet up the steep flank of the hill on the right side (looking upstream) in which he took refuge with some of his companions until the danger of any further attack by the Quraish had passed with their withdrawal. Rough steps have been provided now for pilgrims visiting the cave, whose mouth is about two feet wide and six or seven feet high. Incidentally there are always a couple of policemen on duty at the grave of Hamza to prevent unseemly exaggerations of the prescribed ceremonial of vistration. Such are the outward and visible marks of the battle of Uhud, which had the curious result of the immediate retreat of the victors without any further attempt to drive home their advantage.

VI. JABAL UHUD

UHUD is by tradition one of the seven hills of Paradise. Of the others four are in the Mecca area, namely Abu Kubais, Thaur, Nur and Al Rahma (on the plain of 'Arafat). The sixth is Radhwa towering 6,000 feet, or perhaps more, over Yanbu' and the last is Warqan, also a true mountain not far to the south-west of Madina on the way to Rabigh. The ancient and modern lava-streams that have lapped at various times up to the rim of the Madina basin would seem to have had their source somewhere near this last, but I have had no opportunity of investigating this tract myself. By far the best general view of the Madina district is to be obtained from the summit of Uhud, on which stands a small square masonry building, sometimes whitewashed, known as Qubbat Harun—the domed-shrine of Aaron! This spot overlooks the country below from a height of about 1,500 feet and is thus approximately 3,500 above sea-level. The more energetic spirits of Madina occasionally face the arduous climb necessary to reach the summit, but the “tomb” of Aaron is not on the programme of pilgrim visitations. It is, therefore, not often troubled with visitors at any rate nowadays, while I think I can claim the distinction of being the only European to have reached (or attempted to reach) the top. On the occasion of my visit in June, 1931, I had

"The City Illumined"—Madina

the pleasure of the company of a man nearer seventy than sixty, who had last climbed the mountain nearly half-a-century before and who had lost nothing of his physical energy in the interval, one Muhammad al Saqqaf, who had only recently returned to the Hijaz after forty years of sojourning at Constantinople and elsewhere abroad. With us was a servant to carry a skin of water for our refreshment at the summit in the likely event of the little masonry tank by the shrine being dry, as indeed it was.

The three of us, having visited Sidi Hamza by car and continued thence about a mile up the ravine in the same vehicle, took to our feet at a point inside the mountain barrier where the rocks come down sheer to the sandy valley in a series of narrow gorges. It was hot enough in all conscience at that time of the year, but each shoulder or fold of the mountain cheered us on with lovely glimpses of the rich basin below, with the heavenly minarets and green dome of the Prophet's mosque standing out, as it were, from a carpet of green—the roofs of the surrounding palm-groves. Taking it quite easily and even collecting its mountain plants as we went, of which old Saqqaf still remembered all the local names from his boyhood days, we reached the top in rather less than two hours after a strenuous walk involving nothing in the nature of climbing. And there, with a frugal breakfast and water and tobacco to sustain us, we remained for over an hour looking down upon as fair a scene as any in Arabia. In the very centre of the picture stood the great mosque and the city, fringed with palms and enclosed within the grim arms of the outspread lava, seen from here to extend over a vast space beyond the range of vision to south and east. On the west a wide tongue of it thrusts upward between the city area and the broad sandy 'Aqiq valley, while the whole background is formed by the crystalline ranges of 'Air and Jamma'wat, extended northward by the basalt kopjes of Hibishi and Shudhaf, through which the railway, crossing the 'Aqiq on a low flat bridge close by the old Turkish aerodrome of Sultana, winds its way northwards. On the east, immediately at the foot of Uhud, a narrow corridor between it and the frozen tide of lava carries the eastward road to Ha'il and the Qasim

Jabal Uhud

and Baghdad over a series of desert ridges, while northward of the massif on which we stood ran the broad sandy valley of Wadi Nuqumi, backed by the great walls of Wa'ira, Wu'aiyira and Jabal Baidha, and joining the 'Aqiq valley at the north-western extremity of Uhud between the well-cultivation of Zubair and the palms and tamarisks of Al Ghaba. Within this formidable setting lay the fertile basin of Madina: here a great patch of white evaporated salt against a background of serried palms, there a series of little farms each clustered about a well, and again the broad strands of the life-giving torrent-beds, all converging on the narrow gap in the north through which, as a single blade, they carve their way to the distant sea.

Such was the scene before us—the cradle of a great faith which now claims the allegiance of a third of the human race: the crater of a human convulsion which has profoundly affected the history of three continents between the Pacific and the Atlantic. Yet how easily things might have gone awry. But a little more of Nature's malice, a slight advance of the molten stream from the mountain's bowels—and the basin would have been filled with the doom that encircles it. Madina could never have existed to nurse its foundling faith. And again, had but the tide not ebbed from the distant plains of France to spend itself in the end against the barrier of the Pyrenees, the message of Muhammad might have reached Paris and London. The Church of Ethelbert, as St Sophia was to do many centuries later, might have turned its face to the Meccan *Qibla*, and Islam dominated Europe. Not so was it fated. The Christian West remained faithful to the city of the Jews while Madina, illuminated for a brief space by its mission fulfilled, restored to Mecca her birthright with the added homage of the East. It is strange indeed that these three cities, all on the same meridian in a desert land, should thus have enthralled the imagination and retained the loyalty of nearly the whole world. Of the three, Madina has suffered most from the ravages of time, but changed least. The wealth and devotion of her admirers have transformed Jerusalem beyond recognition, while Mecca, compelled to accommodate myriads of visitors in her narrow valleys at the prescribed seasons, has become a

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

vast, motley suburb of its chief monument, with a motley population among which one seeks almost in vain the old citizens who drove the Prophet from their midst and welcomed him back to rule over them.

We returned to Sidi Hamza by the same track as we had followed going up. It was not, however, till my second visit in 1935 that I had time to follow the Qanat valley down to the impenetrable jungle of the *Ghaba*. To that point there is a practicable route for motor-cars, but my attempt to go a little further ended in disaster. The car, confined to the narrow spaces between the tamarisks and unable to manœuvre, stuck in a patch of soft sand, and it was only with the willing help of the negro tenants of a neighbouring palm-grove that we eventually extricated it. Apart from the serried masses of palms already referred to—each grove having a name of its own—the only feature of interest in this lower reach of the valley is a large natural basin, about 100 paces square and of no great depth, known as *Birkat al Yahud* or the tank of the Jews. There seems to be no particular reason for the name, and it is scarcely likely that the low wall of sand and gravel which surrounds the depression can have been made by Jewish labour or enterprise. It has the alternative name of Umm Sudaira, and it is said to fill up when the floods converging on it are at all abundant, though it was dry when I saw it. The valley here is about three miles wide between the mountain ridges on either side, being formed by the three streams of the Madina basin. A mile or so beyond the furthest point reached by me the Nuqumi valley, running along the northern flank of Uhud, joins it, while some distance further on, before the Hafira station of the railway is reached, the combined channel joins that of Wadi Hamdh, coming through the hills about Jabal Baidha, and continues under that name on its passage to the sea.

Between this valley and the Ditch lies a considerable tract of fairly level ground dotted with farms, some of which are interesting for their traditional or historical connections. The aerodrome of Sultana on the left bank of the 'Aqiq channel has already been mentioned. It has been derelict since the War

Jabal Uhud

but, early in 1936, it resumed the function for which it had been made by the Turks and was visited by aeroplanes of the Bank Misr organization to enable Tal'at Pasha Harb to consider the feasibility of an air-service for Egyptian pilgrims. The journey from Jidda was made in two hours as against the normal two-day programme of the motor-cars, which itself compares with about eleven days by camel. That an air-service can be arranged has been duly demonstrated; and there is little doubt that the wealthier pilgrims of the near future will be visiting the Prophet in this way. In fact, in March of the same year, Her Highness the Princess Khadija 'Abbas Halim, sister of the ex-Khedive of Egypt, had the honour of being the first flying pilgrim, proceeding by air from Jidda to Madina and thence to Egypt.

Not far from Sultana lie the ruins of a small fort of medieval appearance, named after Sa'id ibn al 'As, a renowned general of the early Islamic armies, who led the invasion of Egypt after the Prophet's death. Solidly built of squared blocks of lava, with a circular bastion at the north-west corner, the structure extends forty paces from north to south and thirty from east to west, and probably consisted of three or four chambers and a large yard, occupying its southern half, for the accommodation of the camels or horses of the garrison. Commanding, as it does, the channel of Wadi 'Aqiq, it is a spot which might well have been chosen for defensive purposes in the Prophet's time to prevent the use of this easy route by the Meccan armies. If so, it must have been selected after the battles of Uhud and the Ditch, to both of which the invaders came by this route. It would seem, on the whole, more probable that the ruins here represent a fort of much later Turkish times, when Khalid Pasha in the eighteen-thirties was concerned to meet the obstreperousness of the Bani Muhammad section of the Bani Salim Harb. It was at any rate to this period to which are ascribed the bastion of Husn Lu'ab, occupying a salient of the Yathrib ruinfield, and an attractive circular tower near the palm-grove of Al Madaniya known as *Shuqaim al Dhib* or, more simply, as Khalid's fort. These, with the Sa'id ibn al 'As fort and another fort in the village of 'Arwa, to say nothing of the

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

turret of 'Usaifir and a large fort on the Harra platform on the road to Quba, form a continuous line of outposts facing the Bani Muhammad mountains on the west from the flanks of Uhud, at each end of which is also a fort on high ground, to beyond the Rabigh road.

In the midst of this level plain stands the mosque of Ruma, which is a favourite locality for the visits of pilgrims, while close by it on a low outermost spur of the protruding lava is the mosque known as *Al Qiblatain*, perhaps the most famous single monument of the Madina district. It is a miserable little structure and cannot possibly be regarded as having existed in its present form since the Prophet's day, but it may well occupy the site of a mosque of that period, in which it is said the people of the neighbourhood were actually engaged in praying with their faces towards Jerusalem, when news came of the change of the prayer-direction towards Mecca. The congregation promptly faced about and a new *Mihrab* was made in the southern wall, while the original one, though henceforth disregarded, was left as it was. Hence the mosque is known as the mosque of the two *Mihrabs*, which are, of course, shown to visitors with pride by the official guides. The northward niche showed a direction of true magnetic north by my compass, while that facing Mecca was five degrees east of south.

VII. THE QUBA MOSQUE

THIS change of *Qibla* is supposed to have taken place towards the end (some say the eleventh month) of the first year of the *Hijra*, but there seems to be no agreement as to the spot on which the change was first introduced. Some say that the Prophet was leading the prayers in his own mosque (the present *Haram*) with his face to Jerusalem according to his then custom when, in obedience to divine inspiration, he turned about and completed the service facing Mecca. This theory involves a slight difficulty inasmuch as the latter part of the service must have been performed with the backs of the congregation towards the *Imam* or prayer-leader. A simpler explanation is,

The Quba Mosque

however, provided by the Quba mosque, which is known to have been frequently visited by Muhammad, and which preserves not only the site of the original Jerusalem *Qibla*, though not the actual niche as in the case of the *Qiblatain* mosque, but also a secondary southward *Qibla*, known as "*Kashf Makka*," confronting the spot on which the Prophet was miraculously vouchsafed an actual view of the *Ka'ba* and the Meccan temple. This niche is at the east end of the main south wall, in the middle of which is the ordinary *Mihrab* from which the regular services are conducted, while visitors are expected to make their extra (*Sunna*) devotions before the *Qibla* of the *Kashf*.

The probability that Quba was the scene of this important change is enhanced by another monument in the mosque generally known as *Manzil al Aya* (the place of the sign or revelation), and generally understood to be the spot on which the Prophet received the divine command to build the mosque. Here the difficulty arises that at that time the mosque already existed, being indeed traditionally the first mosque of *Islam*, in which the Prophet's earliest followers had been in the habit of holding services before his own arrival. If this were not so, the claim of Quba to be the first mosque could not be sustained as the *Haram* site was used for prayers from the very day of the Prophet's arrival in the town. It would seem more than likely therefore that Muhammad, on a visit to Quba, was conducting the service, facing Jerusalem, at this spot when the divine revelation to change direction was accompanied by the miraculous view of the *Ka'ba*, whose exact direction was thus immediately ascertained. Such matters cannot, however, be dogmatically pronounced upon in the absence of a definite authoritative tradition.

Close by the *Manzil al Aya*, and tending to confirm the view that it was the site of an already existing *Mihrab* at the time of the Prophet's arrival, is another monument known as *Mabrak al Naqa*, the spot at which his camel couched of its own volition on arriving among the faithful. To-day the spot is marked by a prayer-niche under a somewhat heavy flattened dome, resembling the platforms used in some mosques for the *Mukabbir* or human megaphone, who repeats the various for-

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

mulæ after the *Imam* for the benefit of large congregations who cannot actually hear the *Imam's* words. In Arabia at any rate, the mechanical amplifiers, widely used for similar purposes nowadays, are not yet viewed with favour though they may some day come into general use in the larger mosques.

The only other monument in the interior of the Quba mosque is the preacher's pulpit to the west of the central *Mihrab*. This is, of course, only used for sermons and similar purposes, which are delivered facing the congregation and therefore with the preacher's back to Mecca. At Madina, by implication, the preacher faces north towards Jerusalem, while at Mecca the pulpit faces north-east. The mosque at Quba is a good solid structure built of squared lava-blocks for about half its height and of bricks of local clay, about two inches thick, above them to a row of crenellated pinnacles running all round the roof. It has only a single, quite attractive, minaret. By the entrance, on the west side, stands a small domed structure, formerly a mosque dedicated to 'Ali or Fatima. Since falling into disuse for the purpose of devotions it has been used as a flour mill, but at present it is reserved for the accommodation of the small force of police allotted for duties in connection with the mosque.

The mosque is very picturesquely situated in the midst of gardens at a distance of about three kilometres from the Quba gate of Madina. Behind it extend the semi-ruinous lava-built houses of a little village, fringed with palms. About half a mile along the road leading through the village from the mosque to the edge of the lava-field stand the ruins of a small mosque, without roof, which was identified by Turkish experts sent down at the time of the construction of the Hijaz Railway as the *Masjid al Dhirar* (or *Al Musabbih*), vaguely connected with some incident of the Prophet's time which involved his followers in damage or disaster. This identification of so problematical a site is doubtful, and the scene in which the building stands is as dreary as can well be imagined. On one side lie the tumbled ruins, partly inhabited, of the village, on the other a ten-foot wall of lava fragments dividing the furthermost fringe of the palm-groves from the lava-field beyond, extending to the limit of sight. The mosque building is only

The Quba Mosque

ten paces by seven in area, with a prayer-niche in the long south wall and the entrance opposite it. It has neither cupola, nor minaret, nor roof, and may have been an open-air place of prayer for the villagers.

Right out in the lava-field, rather more than a mile to the south, rises a hillock called *Al Husn*, on which Fakhri Pasha, the defender of Madina during the War, built a small fort. Closer at hand, on the edge of the lava, are the southernmost gardens of Quba, from which at the time of my visit proceeded the shrill shrieks of a Ruston-Hornsby engine harnessed to a well. On closer inspection I found quite a charming garden, belonging to one Salih al Qadhi, who was so pleased to have a visitor that he took me round to see all he was doing and hoped to do. The engine, working on charcoal-gas, was in daily use without a stop from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., without producing any sensible effect on the inexhaustible supply of clear sweet well-water lying at a depth of twenty to twenty-five feet from the surface, the engine itself being sunk ten feet below ground-level in a side-shaft. The main feature of the garden was its masses of lovely roses in bloom—a strange contrast to the dreary lava wilderness coming down to its very edge and the lava villages on the other side. Next door to this garden was another, somewhat similar, called 'Ammariya, while the palm-groves extended northward from them encircling Quba on the east side.

No spot in the whole district is more popular among the pilgrims than Quba. The way is short and the reward is great. In the Prophet's own words: "He who performeth ablutions at home and proceeds to the mosque of Quba, his guerdon is as the guerdon of the 'Umra (lesser pilgrimage)." So, in the season, pilgrims are always to be found here. Few of them miss seeing the famous *Bir al Khatim*, the well in which the Prophet is said to have lost his seal-ring. It is situated at the edge of a garden on the opposite side of the road from the mosque, and it would seem to derive its water from the same bountiful spring which supplies the city through the aqueduct of 'Ain Zarqa. The shaft which contains the fountain-head of the latter is barely a stone's throw from the Ring well, while somewhat

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

above the present water-level in this latter there is an outlet and channel connecting with the *Zarqa* aqueduct at no great distance. Why the water has sunk so far that it no longer reaches the outlet is an unexplained problem.

The *Zarqa* channel can easily be traced by its manholes all the way to the city, through it and beyond to a point not far north of the Damascus Gate. Its maintenance is the constant care of an official committee, which has a special fund at its disposal, regularly augmented by the offerings of the pious. The committee has a permanent office in the '*Ainiya* square, so called from the presence there of the central (covered) tank served by the aqueduct, which also used to provide water for the irrigation of the '*Ainiya* garden before this was demolished to make way for the street already referred to. Besides this aqueduct, the city is liberally sprinkled with public and private wells, many of the latter being within the precincts of private houses.

VIII. OTHER SUBURBS OF MADINA

IN the neighbourhood of Quba, though more visited by residents than passing visitors, who have but little time to dally in the gardens, there are the two old Jewish villages of 'Awali and Qurban. The latter bears the name of a Jewess of former times and has, in the midst of its typical, dismal habitations of black lava, an '*Itm* or mound of earth and masonry, about fifteen feet high and with flattened top, like that of 'Ali al 'Uraidh which is rather higher. These villages were probably never more than petty agricultural suburbs and the actual houses must have been built and rebuilt many times since the extermination of their Jewish population. The gardens are as good as any in Madina. I did not visit the hill known as Harrat Quraiza, a mile or two out from the villages in the midst of the lava-field, but I was told that the deserted ruins of a Jewish fort or village are to be seen on its slopes, perhaps the actual scene of the investment and surrender of the Bani Quraiza.

Following up the edge of the lava northwards, and leaving a

Other Suburbs of Madina

small isolated strip called Harrat Dashm on the left, one comes to the conspicuous mosque of 'Ali al 'Uraidh, of whose connection with local Jewish history I have already said enough. On the road to it from the *Sadaqa* gate and near a now disused subterranean aqueduct I noticed a stone trough, which may originally have been a sarcophagus. The road branches here to the right from the main north-eastern highway and soon reaches the mosque which is set in an area of cornfields, with a few palms, irrigated from several wells with a mouth diameter of about ten feet and plentiful water at a depth of fifteen feet below ground-level. At one time the number of these wells was greater, but the locality now has a poor and deserted appearance, though one of the shafts is worked by an engine-driven pump. The 'Itm of Marhab lies about 100 metres away from the south-east corner of the building, which consists partly of the mosque proper, occupying its south-west section, and partly of a long dwelling-house divided into three parts. A heavy iron door, swinging easily on its hinges, gives access to this part of the building and nearly caused a disaster when I was being shown round by the woman who admitted us. As she was explaining something to my party the great door swung slowly back unnoticed by her and I was just in time to dash forward and rescue her small boy from what would have been a very unpleasant knock. A few palms grow within the courtyard of the building with the mosque section at the side, the chief features of which are the simple tombs of 'Ali al 'Uraidh (son of the Imam Ja'far al Sadiq) and his son 'Abdul Rahman, and also three still simpler graves of local adherents (*Ansar*) of the Prophet. A single minaret rises from the middle of the west side of the building which is a rectangle fifty-five paces long and twenty-eight broad.

Returning by a more direct route to the city we halted briefly at the ruins of a small mosque, known as Masjid Ijaba and commemorating the site on which the Prophet prayed for and was assured of victory before the attack on Bani Quraiza. For this reason the spot was regarded as propitious for the offering up of such supplications until destroyed by the *Wahhabis* in 1925 on account of its dome, though there never were any

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

graves in the building. In this same neighbourhood, quite close to the *Baqi'a* cemetery and the *Jum'a* gate, there are three other small mosques which are supposed to be connected with the births of Hasan and Husain to Fatima, daughter of the Prophet. The tract is called *Jaz al Ma'ida*.

The *Firuziya* mansion and gardens, in which I was lodged on the occasion of my visit in June, 1931, lie somewhat to the right of the main north road outside the Damascus Gate. As already noted, the last manhole of the '*Ain Zarqa* aqueduct lies a little way up the road by the side of a ruinous heap which, before the *Wahhabi* conquest of Madina, was the domed tomb of Zaki al Din, son of the Imam Hasan. A little further on, on a little eminence by the side of a low pass (the “Strait of Farewell” where departing visitors turn to say a final goodbye to the Prophet), stands the mosque of the standard (*Masjid al Raya*), where the Prophet distributed the banners to be carried at the battle of the Ditch. Beyond this is a small knoll called Jabal Abi 'Ubaid al Akbar, while between the two is a depression generally accepted as having been part of the Ditch itself, the exact line of which is perhaps a little doubtful though many local scholars, including my friend the librarian, have given the matter much thought and arrived at what seems a very satisfactory alignment. To right and left of this spot, looking north, the moat excavated by the Prophet and his men to cover the “nakedness” of Madina extends in a shallow arc linking the protruding Harra ridge of *Al Shaikhain* near 'Ali al 'Uraidh with the present compound of the Wireless Station and continuing thence past the north end of the “Strait of Farewell” to the northern extremity of the Sil'a ridge (now surmounted by a fort) and thence to the northerly edge of the western lava tongue in the neighbourhood of the *Qiblatain* mosque. A part of the Ditch on the right-hand side of the road at this point was used a century ago for dumping the debris of the Prophet's mosque after its destruction by fire and has thus been filled in to its old level. A little way on one comes to the fort-like gateway of the Wireless Station, after which the road, skirting the western wall of its compound, passes on across open fields to the fort of Khalid near the eastern end of the

Other Suburbs of Madina

'Uyun palm-groves. The main north road forks from this road towards Ruma from a point near the knoll of Abi 'Ubaid, which is also called Qurain.

Having thus disposed in some detail of the actual surroundings of Madina, I must say something of the only locality outside its limits to which a visitor, having already hastened through it in his eagerness to arrive at the city, might contemplate an excursion. This is the small oasis of Abyar 'Ali lying along both banks of Wadi al Hasa (as the Wadi 'Aqiq is called before entering the Madina basin) in the wide gap between the ranges of 'Air (traditionally, I believe, a hill of hell) and Jamma'wat, whose crystalline rocks provided the masonry for the Prophet's mosque as it is to-day. Passing out through the Anbariya Gate and along the station yard to the lava edge, one comes in two-and-a-half kilometres to the mosque and village of 'Arwa on the right bank of Wadi 'Aqiq. The water in the large well here is reported to be the best of the whole district, and the epicures of the city send out as far as this for their supplies. Another kilometre on the track passes an old, reputedly Jewish fort, perched on the black cliff of the Wadi's right bank. And so, at eight kilometres in all from the Anbariya Gate, the miserable little village of Abyar 'Ali is reached. Behind the village and in a charming setting of palms on the left bank of the channel stands the whitened mosque with a pleasing minaret and a sort of rest-house known as the *Diwan*, its walls all scribbled over with the tokens of visitors. Upstream of this point and mainly on the right bank lies a series of small oasis-plots—Dhaiyaniya village on the left bank near the main palm-grove of Abyar 'Ali itself, Fudhaiya, Humaiya, and 'Uwaidiya, on the opposite side with 'Alawa further up, where the channel bends along the foot of al Asmar ridge. Further on the Wadi bends again to the south round the peak of Hamra Nimri, which was the site of the British Consul's (S. R. Jordan) camp at the end of 1926 for the first abortive negotiations for a treaty between *Wahhabi* Arabia and Great Britain. Sir Gilbert Clayton was sent the following year to take up the broken threads of the parley and the treaty of Jidda was the result. Where the Wadi al Hasa actually rises I do not know—possibly

“*The City Illumined*”—*Madina*

in the high slopes of the Warqan mountain or in that neighbourhood. At Abyar 'Ali it is the actual custom for pilgrims returning from Madina to Mecca to don their *Ihram* garments for the 'Umra. All the necessary accommodation for the purpose—wattle huttings, earthenware jugs, refreshments and the like—is available here. Shaikh Ibrahim al Kharputi, however, maintains that, while the assumption of the *Ihram* at Abyar 'Ali is permissible, it is actually preferable that, in the case of pilgrims returning from Madina, this should be delayed till reaching Rabigh or rather a spot called Al Jahfa, ten miles south of it, which was the traditional *Miqat*, or limit, for Egyptian pilgrims travelling by the coast-road to Mecca. As Al Jahfa is no longer on the main pilgrim route, especially in these days of motor-cars, Abyar 'Ali probably has as good a claim to the honour as any place, but the long journey by camel, bare-headed and scantily-clad—whether in the heat of summer or in the cold or rainy season—must be exceedingly trying for the unfortunates who cannot afford to travel by car. And, incidentally, some new precedent will have to be set in the case of air-travel, as Abyar 'Ali provides no landing facilities and probably Jahfa is in similar case. So either Rabigh or even Jidda will have to take their place—or perhaps the Sultana aerodrome of Madina itself.

THE QUEEN OF THE DESERT—RIYADH

HOWEVER familiar one may become with the physical setting of the desert capital of Arabia one can never approach it anew after any period of absence without, as it were, a gasp of astonishment. Invisible until one is quite close upon it, it lies hidden and buried in a veritable "howling" wilderness of shapeless, featureless, calcareous undulations extending northwards and eastwards without relief for close on fifty kilometres. In the midst of it all, but utterly hidden away in the womb of the surrounding desolation, runs the fertile and prosperous valley of Wadi Hanifa between steep eroded banks. Close as it lay to our track we had not so much as a glimpse of its course all the way, and the very first thing that greeted our jaded vision after a couple of hours of dusty speeding from Jubaila was the palms of Shamsiya, the most northerly of the Riyadh gardens, seen from a distance of about four kilometres. A little further on the whole panorama of the northern part of the oasis, including the city in its battlemented walls, swung into view as we topped a gentle rise.

A pall of dust hung lightly over the scene, in which from that distance there was nothing impressive. It was the desert rather than the town that filled one's mind, marked in every direction by the converging radial lines of immemorial caravans and deputations, and ploughed up here and there by the wheels of modern motor transport, which had indeed come to stay though it had by no means yet killed the older modes of progression familiar to the ancestors of to-day's Arabians. Many a party, mostly consisting of some half a dozen persons with as many mounts or more or less, but in some cases of a bigger caravan, was traversing that desert towards the same bourne as ourselves at a speed which suggested arrival on the morrow, while we looked no further ahead than an hour or two before sunset. Whenever we stopped, the following wind, scarcely perceptible during movement but of considerable velocity, drowned us momentarily but completely enough in our

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

own light-yellow dust, and we might well envy our slower rivals some distance off to right or left plodding on serenely without anxiety and without dust. We should be first at the goal of our common endeavour, but they would soon after enter into the same shrine of hospitality. Thousands of them—I heard an estimate of 80,000 souls in all—had been and gone before them and even at that moment the residue of guests—star-spangled on the desert with their tents, white or black or striped, and their women and children and chattels—must have amounted to some 4,000 or 5,000 persons. Ever since the King's return in early July they had been pouring in from all over the country to pay their homage and to receive the due of their "invisible" services—a great and ever-ready standing army paid on the principle of bounty at the sovereign's will, but nevertheless paid at regular intervals on presentation of themselves in person. And, payment being made in accordance with those actually attending to do homage at Riyadh, each tribal or sectional head naturally brings in any such of his sons or nephews as may be old enough to ride postilion on his *dhalul* and make obeisance to the King in person. It is a great and ancient system, often enough abused in the past and capable of the gravest abuses, but now in sure hands that administer it with that mixture of generosity and parsimony of which only the born King has the secret. It is indeed amazing, said Ibn Sa'ud one of these days to a party numbering many *Badawin* chiefs among others awaiting the signal for dinner, that the *Badu* are never really loyal or serviceable unless they are oppressed and used hard. It is the dole that plays the devil with the *Badu*, as practised to-day in 'Iraq and Trans-Jordan, while the kindred practice of regular payment for conscript service as in Najd presupposes a return for what the *Badu* get.

All through the past month the Batha and other convenient camping-grounds round the capital had been full to overflowing with encamped tribesmen from the four corners of the earth. Now the pressure was greatly abated, yet the approach to the city seemed to be thronged with hundreds enough and it was through a formidable press of the toughest of tough

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

humanity that our cars crawled up the main street from the Thumairi gate to the Palace entrance.

As I half expected to hear, the King was out of town at that hour (after the 'Asr prayer or about 4 p.m.) and was not likely to be back before an hour or so after sunset. He was at his country-seat called Badi'a in the Batin, a palace built by his eldest son, Sa'ud, in a big plot of palm-groves inherited or purchased by him. It was difficult to decide what to do in the circumstances. Obviously the whole of our large party could not proceed to the Batin in quest of the King and, having ascertained from various attendants at the gate that the same suite of rooms had been reserved for me as I had had at the beginning of the year, I decided to dump all our luggage in those rooms and to go off alone with Jabir to the Batin. Kordi remained behind with the baggage, while the excellent Tubaishi undertook to make all necessary arrangements to welcome and entertain the rest of the party on arrival. Rushaid al Huwida and Ibn 'Amr accompanied Jabir and me in search of Ibrahim ibn Jumai'a to get his approval of this arrangement. Two camels laden with firewood happened to be proceeding down the same side-street at the same time as ourselves and, camel-like, proceeded to do everything but get out of our or each other's way. In the end they left their loads strewn about the street as impediments to our advance and themselves fled into a maze of alleys beyond the furthest reach of our pursuit. Ibn 'Amr sought out Ibrahim and brought back word that we should certainly go to the King; and in a few minutes, having deposited our baggage at the palace, we had duly cleared the Thumairi gate again *en route* for the Batin—a distance of nine-and-a-quarter kilometres over a fair though not brilliant track, which lay mostly over the calcareous *Safra* north of the Riyadh basin and east of the Hanifa valley.

The King, seated at the wooden-shuttered window of the large sitting-room in the upper storey of Sa'ud's summer-palace, sighted us as we descended the very rough road down to the very sandy *wadi* bed which we had to cross before reaching the door. In spite of Ibn 'Amr's warning that most cars took a longer but easier route to the left to avoid the worst of

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

the sand, which had claimed many victims, I put the little Ford at the direct passage and she answered gallantly with complete success. In a trice we were at the door and upstairs, where I duly greeted the King with the customary kiss on the forehead and saluted the rest of the assembly gathered to him after his afternoon dinner.

His Majesty certainly appeared to be all the better for his month's absence from Mecca, where climatic and economic conditions had before his departure reduced him to a state of irritability and depression. With his arrival in the clean spiritual and physical atmosphere of Najd the clouds of pessimism which had loomed so large throughout the last few months at Mecca had been dissipated. For one thing the removal of the court and all its appurtenances wholesale from the Hijaz to Najd had reduced its cost by at least 60 or 70 per cent., and it almost seemed to me during those first few days at Riyadh that Najd had remained wholly immune from the world-wide economic depression of those hard times. At any rate for reasons partly physical and partly psychological the King was once more in good health, though he himself would not admit to feeling altogether fit. He had latterly become too much addicted to a sedentary life about the palace, moving only from his work to his women and children and from there back to his work. Even in the lovely surroundings of Badi'a he was quite content to sit about indoors rather than enjoy the freshness and beauty of the garden. He seemed now to have no interest whatever in nature, but so much of his early life was spent in the deserts that he had a good store of natural knowledge—though nothing to compare with his old rival, the late King Husain. Nor had he any desire to take exercise in any form, though his great physical bulk—whose centre of gravity had gradually shifted downwards from the chest in due course of the operations of middle age—suggested that a little physical exertion would react favourably on his constitution as a whole. A life of unusual activity through a period of nearly thirty years and of unvarying success achieved only with supreme efforts of will and energy had suddenly changed for the ordered routine of a great career at its zenith.



The King with Sir Percy Cox at 'Uqair in 1920



The Crown Prince (Amir Sa'ud) with his uncle and nephew



The King's Ministers of State

From left to right—Khalid Al Hakim, Rushdi Mulhis, Dr. Mahmud Hamuda, Yusuf Yasin, Khalid al Hud, 'Abdul Wahhab al Naib



The Amir Faisal, Viceroy of Mecca, second son of the King



An open-air conference in a Hijaz village



Officials of the Sa'udi Arabian Government



Top—The King at prayer
Centre—The King performing a war dance
Below—The King with his younger children



Three generations of a Quraish family in the Taif Highlands



Sulubi woman at the desert wells of Duwaid



The late Hajji 'Abdullah 'Ali Ridha, Governor of Jidda
under three kings, with his youngest son and daughter



The Customs House at Jidda



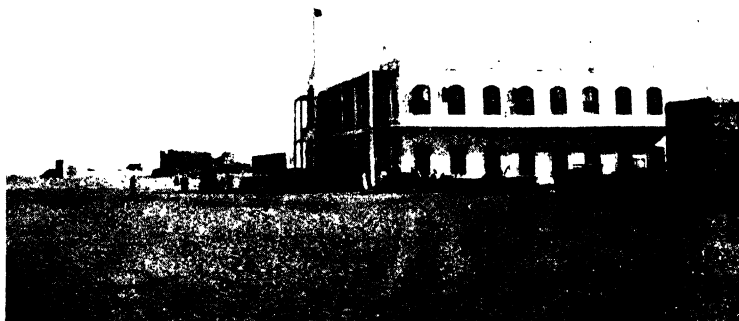
Children of Jidda



The Author of Taif



The Author's wife in Arab robes



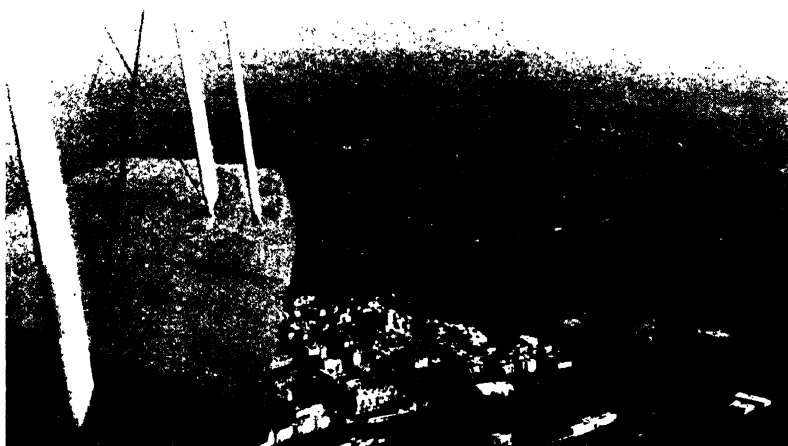
The Author's house at Jidda : Eve's Tomb in background to left



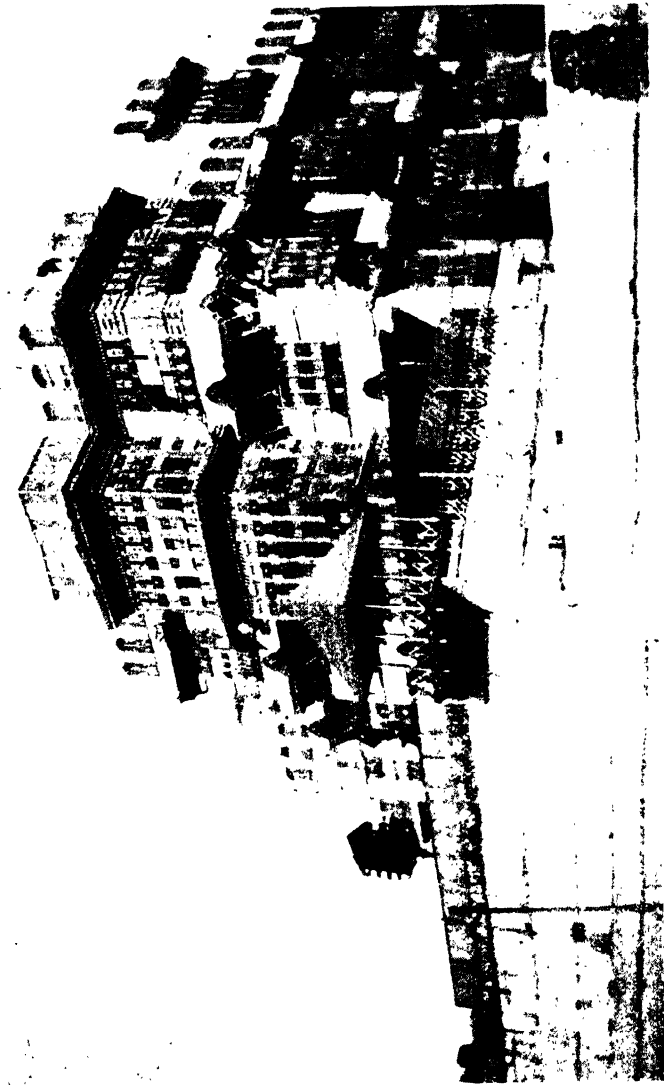
Interior of Author's house at Jidda : open pillared court on
first floor



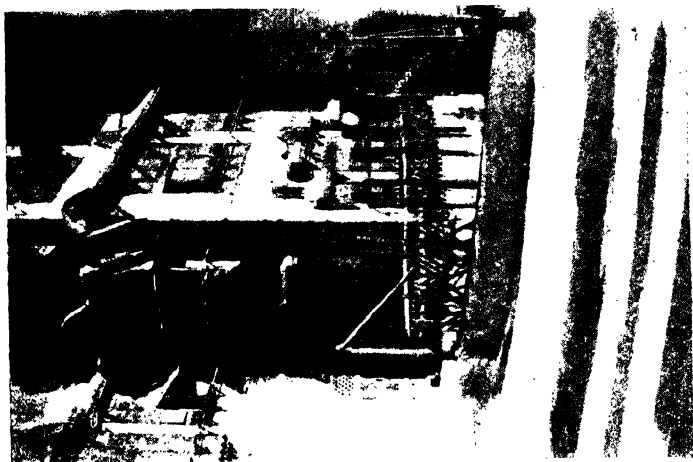
General view of Jidda



Jidda from the air



Bait Baghdadi : A mansion of Jidda



Typical house architecture at Jidda



A street in Jidda



Parade of cavalry and camelry in front of the barracks at Jidda



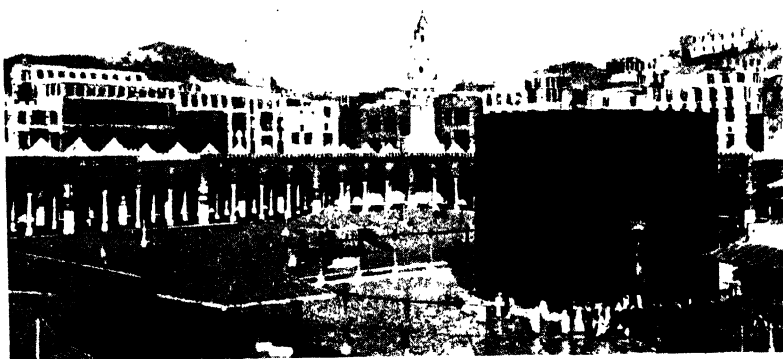
Parade of Sa'udi infantry at Jidda



Caravan leaving Jidda with pilgrims in camel-litters



The boundary pillars of the sacred territory at Mecca

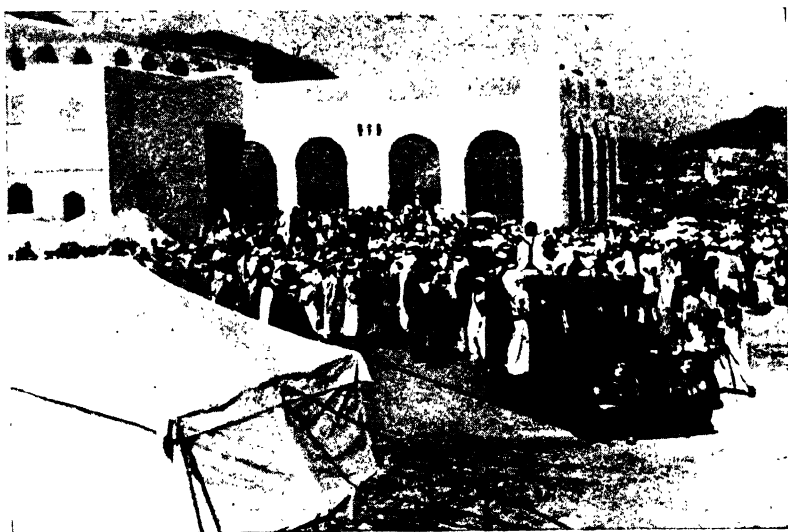


The Great Mosque of Mecca





The Royal Palace in Mecca



The King's Palace at Muna during the pilgrimage



The pilgrim camp at Muna



The pilgrims arrive on the plain of 'Arafat



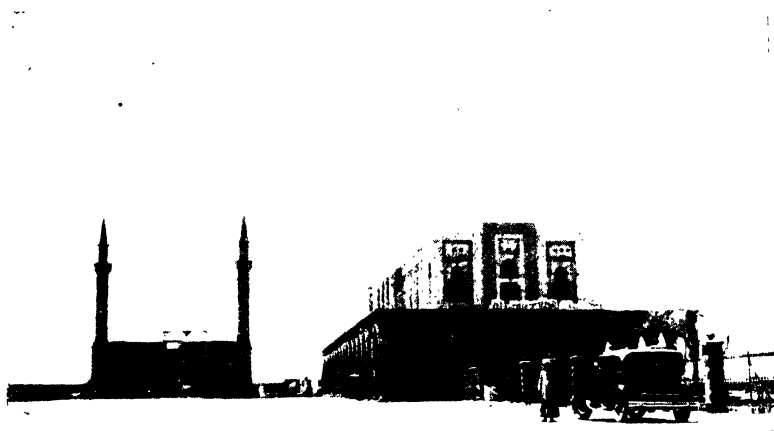
The Mount of Mercy, 'Arafat, during the pilgrimage



The effigy of Satan and the Shrine of the Ram at Muna



Sheep descending from the mountains for the Day of Sacrifice



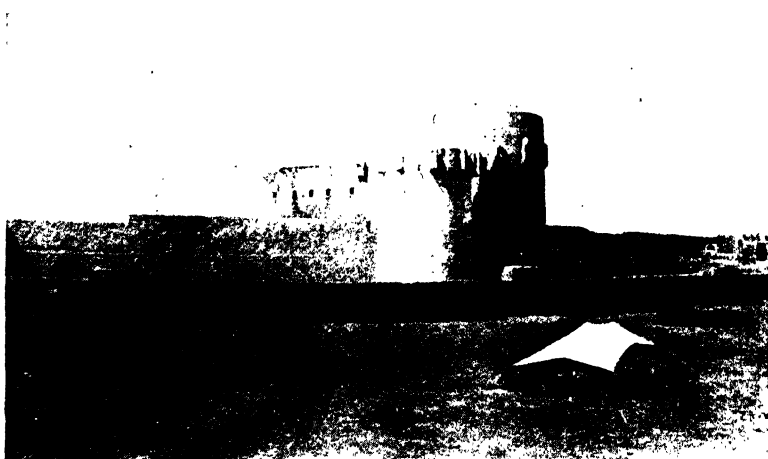
Terminus of the Hijaz Railway at Madina



Street leading from Madina Station towards the Mosque



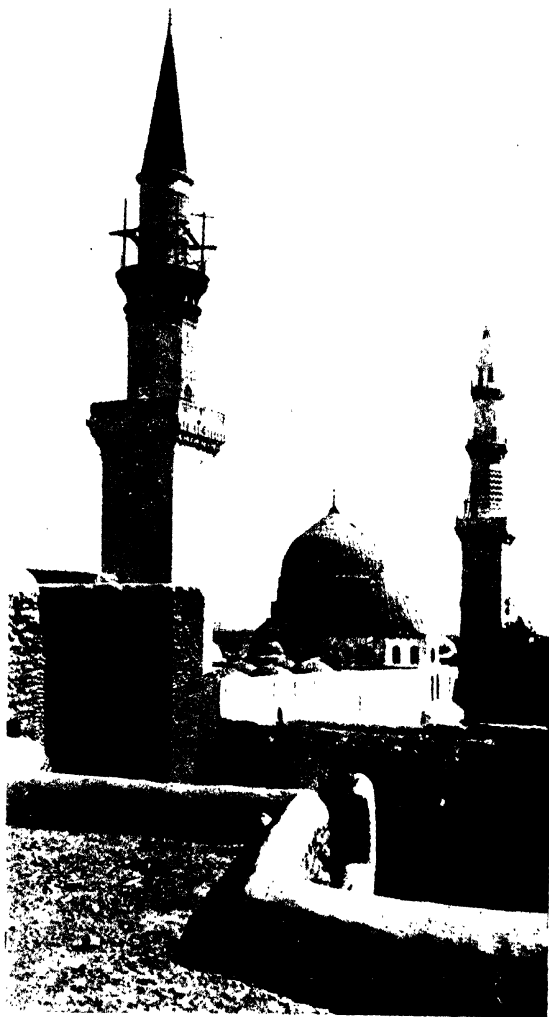
Manakha, the pilgrim camping-ground in Madina



Qasr Sa'idi, the principal fort of Madina



A street in Madina



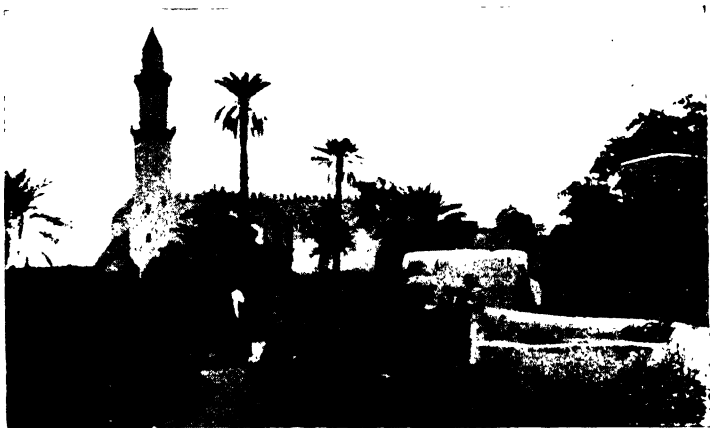
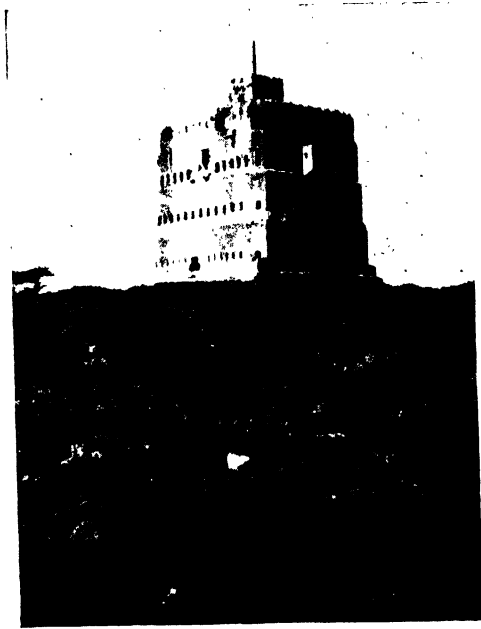
The Prophet's Shrine in the Great Mosque of Madina



Street leading to the Great Mosque



The Great Mosque of Madina

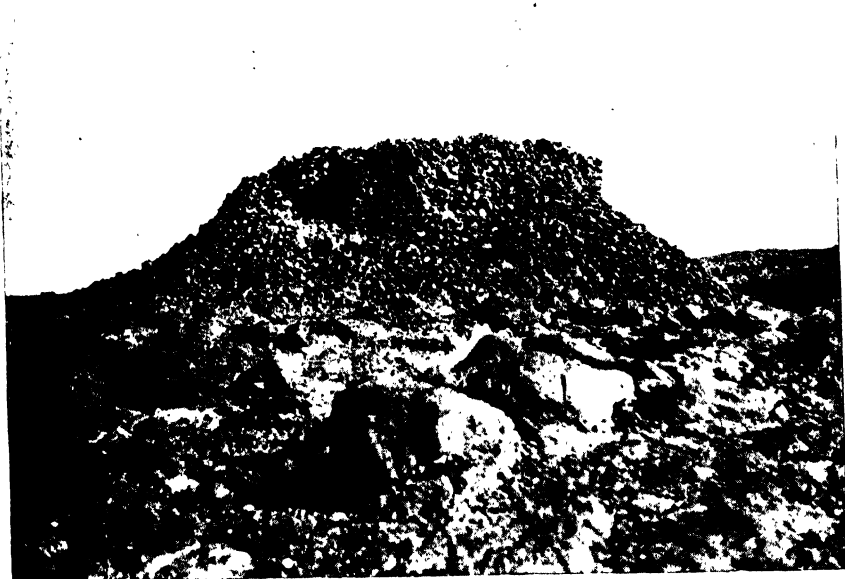


Above—A guard-post on the road from Madina to Quba

Below—The Mosque at Quba



The old city-wall of Madina



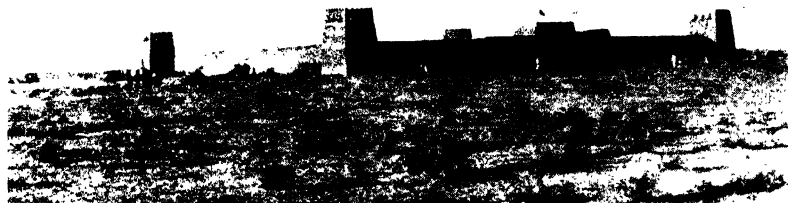
Ruins of a famous Jewish synagogue in Madina oasis



General view of Mladina : looking West



The gold-mine of Mahd at Dhahab between Madina and Mecca



The fort and petrol-station of Duwadami on the motor-road from Mecca to Riyadh



The Well of Mahdatha in the desert east of Mecca



Horses of the Royal stud in Kharj, south of Riyadh



Artesian Lake of Mukhisa in Kharj



Artesian Pool of 'Ain Samha in Kharj



Cars bogged in flooded desert near Riyadh



A river in the desert after heavy rain



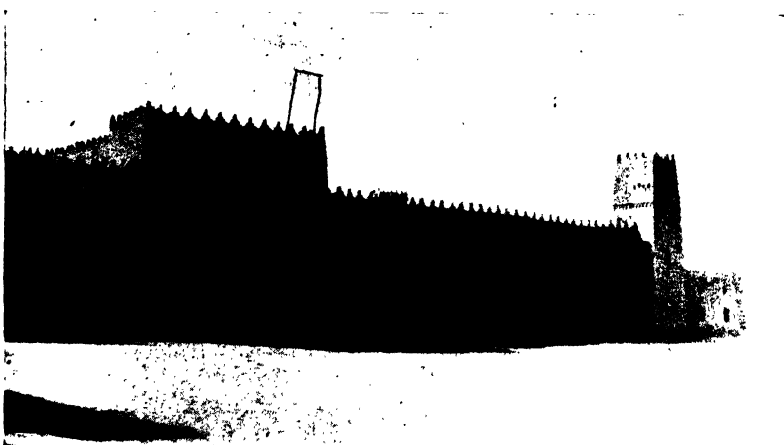
The City of Riyadh



A palm-garden in the Riyadh oasis



The King's summer-palace in the Batin near Riyadh

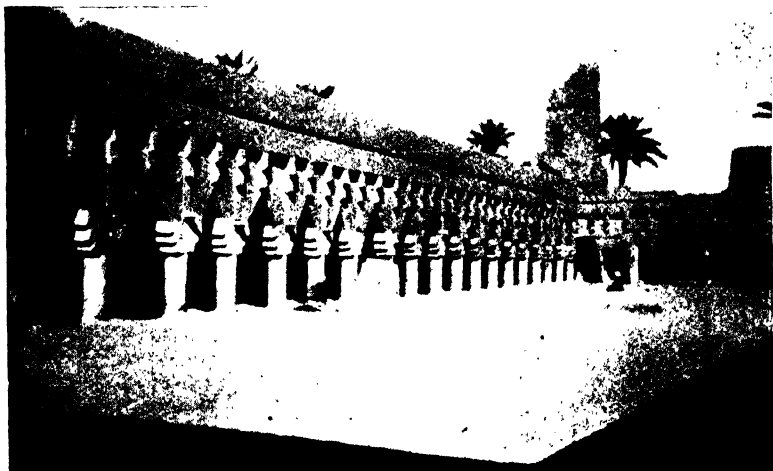


Palace of the King's eldest brother in the oasis of Riyadh

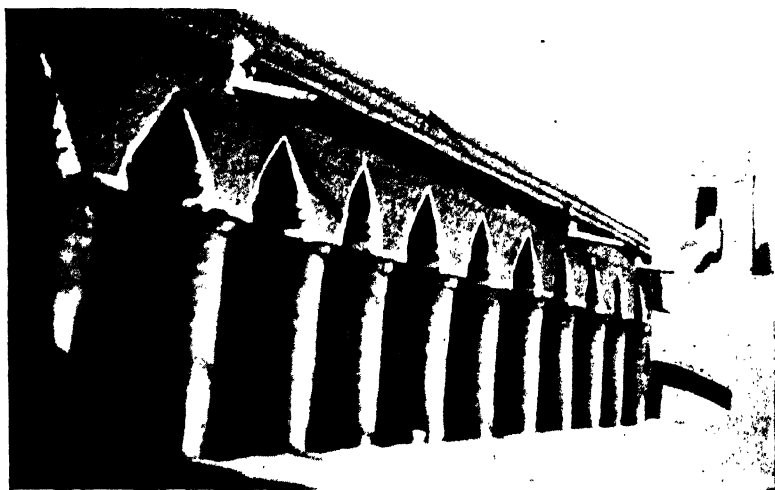


Above—A draw-well in the Riyadh palm groves

Below—The Royal cemetery at Riyadh



The cathedral-mosque of Riyadh



Another mosque at Riyadh



Friday prayers at the Great Mosque at Taif



The town of Taif



The King's Palace at Taif



The aerodrome at Taif



The fort of Ta'if



Stacking juniper scantlings in the Ta'if highlands for the Mecca market



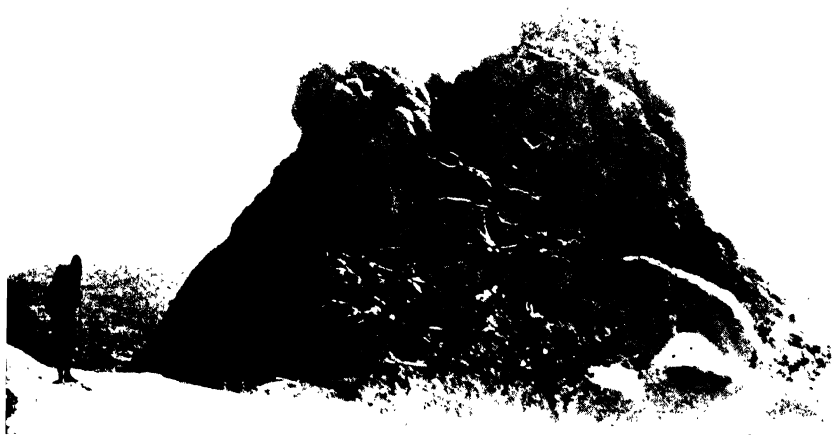
A highland village near Taif



The Taif Torrent (Wadi Wijn) in spate



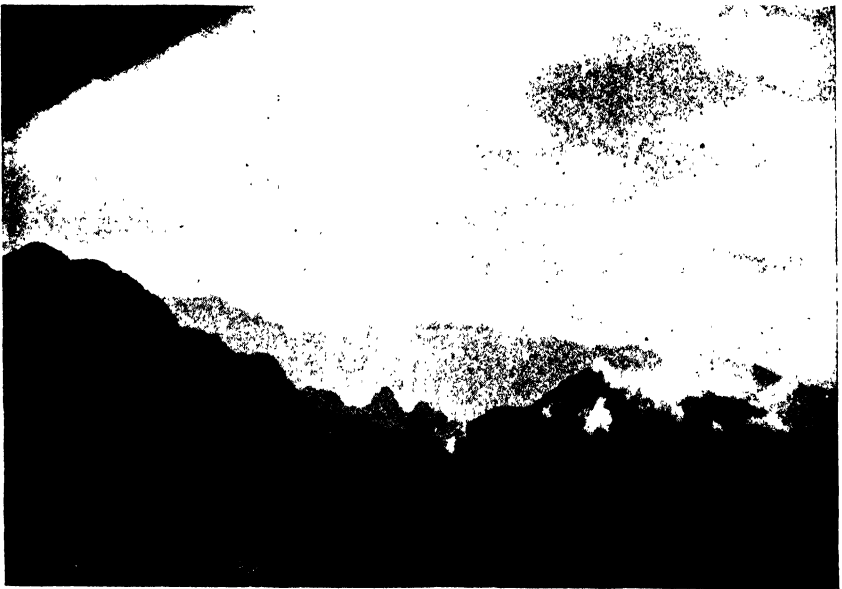
The mountain of Qarnait (8,000 ft.) near Taif



The actual summit of Qarnait



A mountain village (Nikhib) near Taïf



The Hijaz Mountains, as seen from Qarnait



The highlands of Taïf, with Qarnait in central background



The village of Dulaim on the Kara plateau



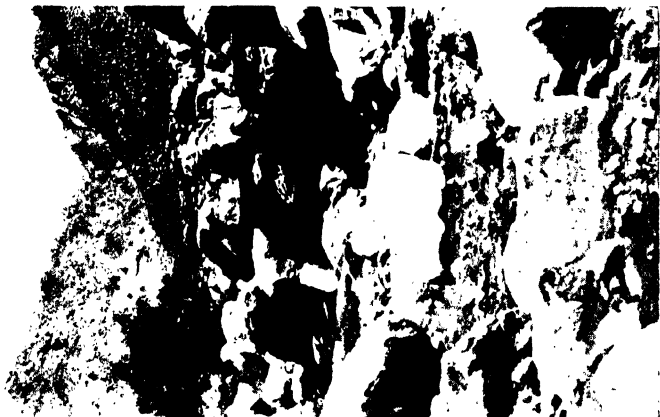
The Hijaz mountain barrier as seen from the lowlands



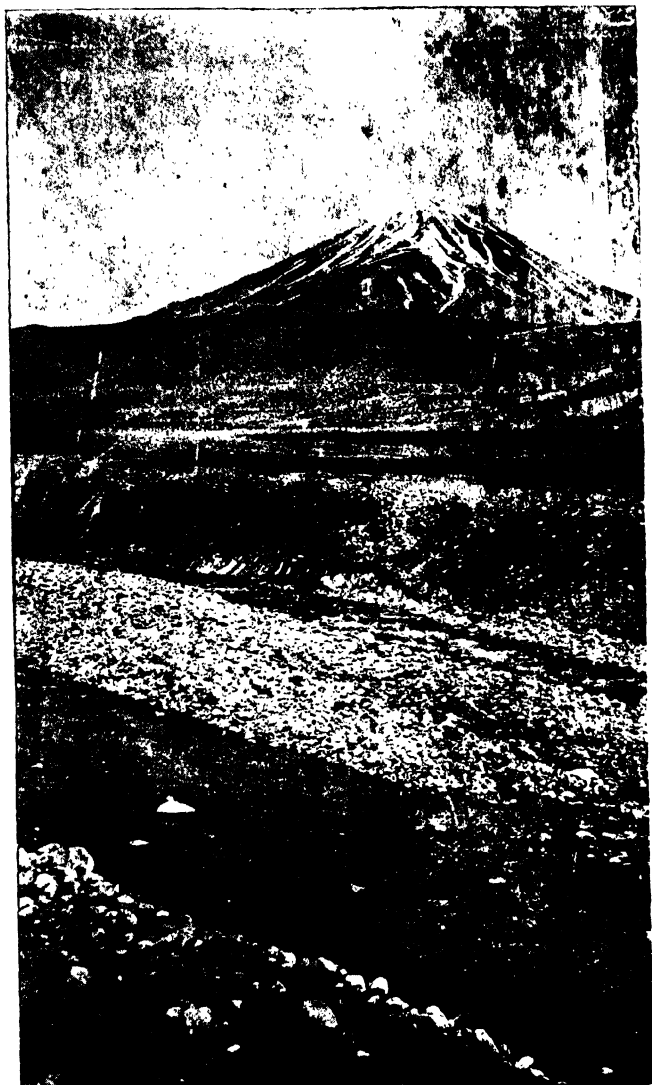
Buttress of the Hijaz Mountains



Paved way at the summit of Kara
pass



Approaching summit of Kara pass
between Mecca and Taif



Mount Damavand (over 18,000 ft above the sea) in
Northern Persia

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

Ibn Sa'ud was still the great man of Arabia; he was still indispensable to its progress under the new regime; but he was no longer alone sufficient for the great task in hand. Latterly he had been trying to do too much, and the inevitable reaction had followed in the guise of a chronic depression, not always evident but nevertheless ever present under the surface and easily probed by any careless touch. In the days of his earliest and perhaps greatest difficulties, with everything at stake down to life itself, he was (as indeed I remember him in a later intermediate phase) always debonair, optimistic, confident, adventurous, democratic. Now, with nothing to lose and comfortably settled at the top of the tree of human greatness he was inclined to be despotic and timid, nervous and pessimistic, sombre-minded and laconic in speech (except in the frequent intervals when he let himself go as of old in *Badu* society, talking of war, women and other experiences). Yet, all things considered, this man, vested with absolute authority over his realm and all that therein is not by divine intervention or the accident of birth but by the weary process of personal labour, and conscious of his absolute power as also, perhaps to some extent, of divine inspiration, had lost surprisingly little of his humanity. Above all, he was a superb specimen of the Arabian chivalry of classic times. Women and horses and camels, milk and dates and desert raids and war—such was the essential background of his career until the folly of Husain or the rising tide of Arab nationalism forced him into the world's arena of politics and diplomacy and imperialism. In the new setting he had never faltered from the beginning, but he had undoubtedly grown weary for want of trusty men to do his will and to explain honestly and fearlessly the truth of new situations of strange character. Of late years the weight he carried had been too much for him. He was less sprightly than before. He was less well. He had possibly shot his bolt, for he was already fifty-one and only the Yaman of the real Arabia (excluding the mandated and protected areas) remained outside the purview of his sovereignty. But, if this was the end of his tether, those who had dreamed of a great Arabia, united and prosperous under Arab rule, might bequeath those dreams to descendants

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

yet unborn, the heirs of centuries hence and a world much changed.

No one could any longer doubt that of all the war-time candidates for hegemony in Arabia Ibn Sa'ud alone had the essential qualities for success. Those who realized this fact in those days naturally tended to impose on him a duty and destiny scarce to be endured by other than a superman—the task of reuniting and regenerating Arabia in the likeness of a Power. And they reckoned not with one factor, which was at the time imponderable though not entirely beyond the scope of fore-diagnosis—the attitude of the European Powers towards the growth of a great and powerful Arab State out of the ruins of the war. We now knew that England and France never intended Arabia to be free, united, and independent; and we knew that Ibn Sa'ud would but be wasting his time to kick against the pricks of mandates and protectorates. The attitude of the European Powers might well, therefore, prove a fatal obstacle to the unification of Arabia in our time. We could not but feel that much of the real trouble of Ibn Sa'ud these days—his fits of depression and pessimism—was the trouble of the lion which has discovered the railings round the park reserved or abandoned to his over-lordship. Economic pressure, arising out of serious administrative extravagance in the days of plenty, and actual want of funds had played their part in the King's latter-day development, but the real trouble was the invisible barrier that straitened his soul. If his task was completed it was ground for grief indeed, but his critics would be able justly to point to a definite lack of achievement at a moment of economic crisis. Those who aspire to be Powers in the world must, of course, show their capacity to play the game—and it can only be admitted with regret that at that moment 'Iraq and Palestine (for instance) would have been quite definitely deterred by the recent experiences of the Hijaz from demanding *Wahhabi* rule in lieu of the existing mandatory system or of possible indigenous substitutes therefor.

The King's exodus from Mecca at the end of June had been, as it were, lock, stock and barrel. As he himself was fond of saying, the move itself was an economy. Half of his daily expendi-

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

ture at Riyadh would be incurred even in his absence—the upkeep of houses, the payment of officials and servants, and the maintenance of the public guest-house—while here very considerable savings could be effected by a stringent restriction of the privilege of using cars. Only some dozen cars seemed to be in regular commission, and there were a score or more kept for traffic with the Hijaz, the Hasa and other places. A larger number were temporarily laid up against future need, though it was not very obvious that they were being properly looked after or secured from the petty pilfering to which all chauffeurs in the country seemed to be so prone.

It cannot be gainsaid that the return of the court in its entirety to Najd was an enormous improvement on the Meccan episode if only it was to be maintained permanently and the King's future visits to Mecca restricted to the indispensable minimum or something like it. And, apart from the economic aspect of the change, now that wireless communication between Riyadh and the Hijaz was (since 19th August, 1931) in actual being, the general administration had nothing to lose and everything to gain by being controlled, from a distance, by the King without his too intimate concern with every detail, such as almost reduced the Government machine to a standstill during the early summer of that year.

As already stated I found the King on my arrival at the Batin enjoying the informal atmosphere of the Badi'a palace with numerous members of the royal family and the *Badawin* and other boon-companions of his ordinary assemblies. Of the *Badawin* there were present at this time Nafi' ibn Fadhliya of the Harb (who had joined the King from the Qasim soon after his return to Riyadh) and Mutlaq ibn Zaid of the Dushan Mutair (a rebel but little more than a year before but now an inseparable henchman of his King, who described him as having entered the fold of Islam of his own volition and not by birth—in fact “like Philby”). On another of these occasions I noticed that Mutlaq was absent. He had, as I learned, gone off with a force of camelry from the King's camp in the desert on some public or private venture of which no details were available. The story whispered about was that he had gone off in

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

search of a girl to wed—these *Badawin* chiefs are uxorious folk and always ready for some fresh matrimonial adventure. In this case, however, I formed the opinion that he had really gone off on a different sort of expedition. Vaguely enough he was off towards the 'Iraq frontier, looking for such troubles as come to men of his kidney, yearning always for some chance of action in the midst of the peacetime stagnation that brooded over the land. Above all, Mutlaq was one of those fanatical folk of Arabia, who could not forget the days, not so long distant, when they would sally forth to strike a blow for the true faith and earn a place in Paradise, though its immediate price might be death. The bright-eyed Muhammad ibn Sahmi of the Qahtan was the third and perhaps least important of the trio; and a few days later Mudhkir of the Hashr (Qahtan) arrived, presumably as a harbinger of Faisal; I noticed various other *Badu* of importance at various times during these few days, including Majid ibn Khuthaila, a *Shaikh* of the 'Ataiba tribe, with a fierce black beard half-concealing a perpetual and most attractive grin. He had special charge of all the King's camels, and had an expert's knowledge of all the most likely haunts of gazelle and bustard at all seasons. Faisal ibn Hashr (since dead and succeeded in the chiefship of his section of the Qahtan tribe by his son, Khalid, a young man with a heavily pock-marked face) was the doyen of the party—a repository of endless stories of adventure in the deserts of the good old days. A hard life had inured him in an astonishing degree to the endurance of thirst—even in ordinary circumstances he scarcely ever touched water. He was not averse to an occasional cup of coffee when he could get it, but milk and dates formed his staple diet with meat, of course, when available. He was reputed to have killed over a hundred men in battle, and his only rival in this line was his contemporary Faisal al Duwish—at this time in prison for rebellion against the King and destined to die in confinement a year or two later.

Of the "civilized folk" in attendance on His Majesty the chief person was undoubtedly Yusuf Yasin, the King's Chief Private Secretary and *fidus Achates*, a young Laodicean of striking appearance (which would any day gain him the chief

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

role at Oberammergau) and very ready wit. Of his ability and devotion to his sovereign there could be no doubt, but it was open to question whether in argument with the King or in the general talk which plays so large a part in the administration he did not efface himself too much to be called a statesman. The King was no doubt a difficult master and had to be humoured, particularly in public, from time to time, but it was on such people as Yusuf Yasin and 'Abdullah al Sulaiman (the Finance Minister) that the future success or failure of the *Wahhabi* Government must rest, and in both of them one could not but discern too great a tendency to agree abjectly to all the words of wisdom proceeding from the royal lips. The difference between the two men perhaps was that Yusuf, while making every effort to persuade his master, if necessary, of the error of any course he might have prescribed, loyally and literally carried out the orders he received; whereas 'Abdullah Sulaiman, a born gambler with all a gambler's instincts and nervousness, was quite prepared to agree with everything Ibn Sa'ud said, and to act on his own responsibility contrary thereto in the hope that his sovereign might have forgotten his orders or accept success as the equivalent of obedience. The weakness of both these strong men was that they would not stand up to the King with the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth on their lips. They were full of fear—fear of what? Fear of losing their wretched little offices or even their wretched little lives! They missed, therefore, the essential quality of human greatness, and, if history remembers them at all, it will be as puppets in the hands of the only *man* of the present generation in Arabia. They will never be classed as statesmen. Yet fear, in the King's own view, is the fount of all good service—nobody serves well but from terror of the consequences of disobedience or incompetence. "*Wallah!*" said Muhammad Shilhub, the Riyadh Treasurer, one day to the King, "*Wallah!* I fear you more than I fear God." "Truly spoken, you wretch," replied Ibn Sa'ud, "for indeed you fear not God." Fear of the monarch is but a natural extension of that fear of God which is the basis of Islam, while their primitive philosophy does not make the distinction that, while God is manifestly infallible

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

and therefore rightly to be feared by the transgressor of his will, the same is not true of monarchs, who often need the advice and sometimes the control of their subjects.

Yusuf Yasin, in attendance on the King away from Mecca, was as it were the Government of the Hijaz and Najd and its Dependencies in embryo. Everything that came from the Hijaz passed through his mill, and he was the mouthpiece of the King in all the correspondence that returned to Taïf or Mecca. Besides him there was a small staff of younger men as clerks and secretaries and typists, but no one of comparable rank or importance. The King's private physician, Dr Midhat Shaikh al Ardh, and his assistant, Ahmad Yasin (in charge of the Riyadh hospital), played no political part at all though they attended private audiences with complete freedom. Apart from them there was at this time an able and intelligent Tripolitan of middle age and very good family, Khalid al Qarqani by name, staying at Riyadh as a guest like myself. The blood of former Arab rulers of Spain (Bani Hud) coursed in his veins, and he had spent much of his life and substance combating the Italian occupation of his native land (now completed by the capture of Kufra in circumstances which had produced loud and vigorous protests all over the Muslim world). During part of 1930 he occupied an official position as one of the assistants to the Viceroy of the Hijaz, but he was not happy in official harness, which incidentally did not produce the revenues necessary for the upkeep of a considerable family of reputedly beautiful daughters, one of whom had latterly become the wife of the well-known Egyptian land-owner and politician, 'Abdul Rahman al 'Azzam. In due course he gave up his official post to join the new German firm of De Haas & Co at Jidda as a partner, and, during the summer of 1931, business being at an entire standstill, he had elected to accompany the King to Najd. He appeared to perform some sort of advisory functions, and had accompanied the American engineer, Mr K. S. Twitchell, on an expedition for making a rough and ready survey of the mineral possibilities of the country. Unfortunately he, too, was one of those who treated the King with too much court diplomacy, and thus missed the opportunity of

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

playing an effective part in the affairs of his adopted country—to which perhaps neither his constitution nor perhaps his heart had yet become fully acclimatized.

This rapid survey of the court circle at Riyadh during these days left me with the pessimistic feeling that, apart from the King himself who for all his faults was a colossus, there was nobody in the *Wahhabi* Government with the combined will and ability to render conspicuous service in the Arab cause. All tacitly relied on Ibn Sa'ud to perform the necessary miracle (which by common consent is the unification of the Arab people under a single government) and sheepishly bleated it about that, if he couldn't, nobody could and nothing mattered much. Never had I felt so depressed about the prospects of Arabia than during these few months after the pilgrimage. It all came quite suddenly with the arrival of the economic crisis in the country towards the end of the pilgrimage season. Up till then a sort of tacit optimism and hope based on the slenderest foundations had kept people alive and alert. The blow fell and the country and government suddenly collapsed as if paralysed. The King allowed nobody to do anything and did nothing himself while, when he went, he left behind a structure recognizable indeed as a Government but on the rocks of bankruptcy with no soul capable of saving it except 'Abdullah al Sulaiman, who proceeded to get married with much pomp and expense and seemed to be preoccupied mainly with the task of saving himself from the wrath to come.

The winter round of frequent hunting expeditions amid the chilly wilderness of Banban and Sulaiy had given place to a rather dreary routine of summer *fainéance*. We were back again, of course, in the not unattractive though severe discipline of regular public prayer. Soon after 3 a.m. each morning, as the faintest of faint columns of something resembling light rose conewise in the eastern night, we were woken to hasty ablutions and a hurried rush to the King's private oratory immediately above the small mosque within the palace precincts. This oratory is in two parts, one roofed and closed in for winter use and the other open to the sky for the summer. Here, if one arrived in time, one performed the two-bow prayer of the

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

Prophet's *sunna* and then awaited the arrival of the King, on whose appearance one of the henchmen would rush to the grill looking down into the mosque shouting *Iqim* or "start!" There followed the customary two-bow prayer of daybreak (*Fajr* as opposed to *Ishraq*) or the actual sunrise, ending with a sort of rosary recital. No *sunna* prayer follows the prayer at daybreak presumably lest the act of praying at the approach of the sun might lead the people into the paths of paganism. After this prayer everyone (or practically everyone) returns to bed where, in my case, I generally remained (on the palace roof) till the sun, at about 6 a.m., was high enough to disturb me. Soon after this, about 7 a.m. or 7.30, the King held audience, apparently in four separate rooms one after the other. The first audience was in his own study, the room in which I had first made his acquaintance and his father's in 1917, for the transaction of business with his clerks or secretaries and to receive any special visitor. He then moved to the public *majlis* next door, a large room with roof supported on six columns and covered with a ceiling cloth, where the callers had already taken their seats. This audience usually lasted but a short time and, if any person deserved a private audience, it would take place in the adjoining room, itself adjoining the study of Yusuf Yasin, where the last and most private stage of the audience was reached. Here Sa'ud, the heir-apparent, or other members of the royal family would appear, and people like the King's physician, Khalid, myself and any others with the privileges corresponding to "private entrée."

Work having now been concluded for the day about 10 a.m. or a little later, the King decamped to the Badi'a palace and garden, where the favourite section of his harem was now permanently installed, and there he remained for the rest of the day till about 7 p.m. when he returned to Riyadh by car to spend the night with one or other of his wives according to the turn of each. In using the term "favourite section" I have perhaps been rash, but perhaps not without reason. He himself always talked of Ahl Mansur (i.e., the mother of Mansur) as the essential and principal part of his household, the part in fact in which he lived permanently and in which he had his meals.

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

The children belonging to this section of the house were Mansur, Bandar, Mish'al and Talal (a baby of one year who replaced a full brother of the same name who died a year before at Ta'if); and the chief of the mothers (mother of Mansur and Mish'al) was one Shahida,¹ who had occupied a special position in the King's affections for more than a dozen years. Another Georgian, mother of Bandar, formed part of this section of the house as also a third, the mother of Talal, but of these only Shahida appeared to have the full position of a wife. Each of the other regular wives (all women of Arab birth) had her separate apartments at Riyadh, while the King's domestic complications were completed by the department of his favourite (and eldest surviving and unmarried) daughter 'Anud, the sister of Muhammad and Khalid and the daughter of the beautiful Jauhara whose place in the King's heart was only filled by Shahida after her death in 1919 and then not entirely until after the passage of many years. 'Anud, who was reputed to be very tall and slender, of some beauty and quick-witted, was destined in a short while to the embraces of her first cousin, the beautiful (almost girl-like), but undersized Sa'ud ibn Sa'd. He was then about eighteen and she perhaps fourteen or fifteen at the most.

Later in the afternoon, about 3 or 4 p.m. and after the '*Asr* prayers, Yusuf and the rest of us would drive down to the Batin and join the King's party. About half an hour later dinner would be served and the rest of the afternoon would be spent sitting round and chatting, generally rather emptily, or perhaps in a short outing in the palm-groves or about the valley while the King retired to his women. After this would come the sunset prayer and more talk over a dish of *Laun* or *Busar* dates, followed by the drive back to town in the King's Hudson, generally eleven of us in or on the car and sometimes only nine or ten—an uncomfortable proceeding as those of us in the back of the car with the King travelled squatting with pins and needles to reward us before long. Nevertheless the King would ever protest against our not sitting in comfort with him on the well-cushioned back seat. The Muslim is not called upon to

¹ She died in 1938.

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

endure avoidable discomfort and there is no need for it. Seek ease whenever possible and avoid only intentional doing of that which is forbidden. Do not contemplate that even on grounds of expediency.

On arrival at the palace the King would go immediately to his private apartments and we to the roof which was allotted for our use during the night. About 8 p.m. we would descend to the King's private oratory to join him at the evening prayer, two complete *taslimat* preceded by one *taslim* of *sunna* and followed by another, after which we would repair to a not very spacious courtyard on the same level for half an hour's reading of *Hadith* and *Tafsir* by the royal precentor, a youth with a good but monotonous voice which generally had a soporific effect on me and defeated my best efforts to follow the reading in detail. For this reading the assembled company was generally not very large and sat on the very commonest high wooden benches with flimsy and dirty cotton upholstery. Coffee would pass round at intervals and the King would bring each section of the reading to an end with a *Barak allah fik*—God bless you. And soon after the close of the reading he would rise and the meeting terminate. Occasionally the King just dismissed the assembly and sat on to transact any work he might have with Yusuf Yasin or, perhaps, the old blind Shaikh 'Abdullah al 'Anqari who was here during these days and regularly attended the readings.

As will be gathered from the above, the only regular meal of the day was the dinner at the Badi'a palace in the late afternoon. Early in the morning a light breakfast of bread, honey, dates and curdled milk was served, and after the *Dhuhr* prayer similarly dates and curdled milk, while one could call for rice and meat also which was in any case provided for the household and servants. In the evening just before going to bed we generally consumed a large bowl of camel's milk each, and on the whole, the food regime was satisfactory enough for the summer season. The chief curse of the place was flies which were just as bad during the summer months as they had been in the winter—a veritable plague which nothing short of a regular and sustained campaign could check. On the other hand there

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

were no mosquitoes and one could enjoy a good night's rest with no other disturbance than the daybreak devotions, though there appeared also to be sandflies or something like them, yet not in great plenty, on the palace roof.

Conspicuous absentees from the nuisance list of a large oriental town were dogs and cats, both so horribly plentiful in towns of the Hijaz. In ten days (of that August) I don't suppose I saw more than two cats in the palace precincts, while I may have come across half a dozen dogs during the same period in my perambulations of the *Suq* and streets. Doubtless *Wahhabi* strictness accounts for the relative absence of dogs, for all I saw seemed to be of a type similar to sheep dogs, which are permitted as also are hunting dogs like *Saluqis*; but I can suggest no plausible reason for the paucity of cats. It may indeed be that human scavenging here is too efficient to leave anything but actual excrement to animals—even vultures (*nasr*) and kites (*rakham*) are rare. The palace kitchens may cater for two or three thousand persons a day and the amount of food—mainly mutton (in quantities regulated by the quality of the guest) and rice with dates and bread—served actually in the *madhif* (or guest-house) and elsewhere within the palace was very considerable. The residue, after all guests and servants had had their fill, was proportionately so and none of it was wasted. At any hour of the day a score or more of women and as many children might be seen at the back-door of the palace with their bowls—the children carry them on their heads when empty like helmets—to receive each her share of the palace overflow. The same process I observed in greater detail at the Badi'a palace. Dinner being served about 4.30 p.m. to the King and his guests, the food passed to the servants who had their fill. In due course about 5 to 5.30 p.m. the residue of the King's dinner and that of the womenfolk passed out under a perfectly well-understood system to be placed on raised trays—by this time there was little but rice left—before such men as might be about the palace, *Badawin* encamped in the valley, agricultural workers of the neighbouring palm-groves, and visitors of low degree. These were supposed to have their fill as they sat, but not to carry anything away, though, on one occasion, my atten-

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

tion was arrested by a man who was toying with the masses of food before him and the guests with him in a manner altogether strange among the ever-hungry *Badu*. In a few moments I discovered the cause of this behaviour. Under his mantle he had a bowl which he meant to fill before he rose from the table, and this as surreptitiously as possible he eventually succeeded in doing, not, however, without many a false alarm which caused him to put back in the centre of the great dish the little hillock of rice he had collected near the brink ready for his bowl. It was obvious that his conduct had the warm approval of those who shared that dish. When the men had finished, the leavings were all gathered together on to two or three large trays and distributed by the palace steward into the two-score or more bowls already collected in a convenient position from a group of children and a group of women separately gathered at no great distance from the scene of feasting. In due course, all the bowls having received their fair share of the dinner residue, and the latter being completely exhausted, the owners came forward one by one to receive her or its share. It was all carried out with the expedition and precision of a military drill and it would have been difficult after the process to discover any hungry person in the neighbourhood. Yet for any dog there would literally have been nothing but bones, and the dogs were certainly not conspicuous in the scene.

On 27th August the King came plunging into my room, followed by Yusuf and Khalid, before I had even had my morning bath. "Where's Philby?" I heard his voice demanding far down the corridor. "Philby! where are you?" Before I had even time to throw a *Kafiya* over my head he was at the door brandishing a telegram just received on the wireless from Ta'if. "Read that!" he said, and I read the news of the resignation of the second British Labour Cabinet and of the intended formation of a Coalition government to deal with the financial and economic crisis at home. Only the previous day had we been discussing the subject at Badi'a and, having seen no newspapers later than 23rd July, the last received before leaving Mecca—I had stated my opinion that such a development was extremely unlikely. Now within less than twelve hours we had

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

news of the *fait accompli*, and the King was thrilled as he had often argued vigorously against my socialistic outlook.

For many days the intellectual life of the palace had been at a low ebb. There was little discussion of serious topics and a sort of tacit avoidance of all economic and political subjects, though the King had summed up the European situation one day with the prediction of a general war before the end of the autumn! The news of the resignation of the British Cabinet, however, had set the wheels of speculation running again and that same evening on the roof of the royal private apartments the King held forth to Yusuf, Khalid and myself on the present situation as between Arabia and the Powers. "Don't think for a moment," he said, "that any part of the Arab race in any part of the Arab world is desirous of having dealings with France or Italy or any other Power, great or small. One and all, they want independence coupled with the support of Great Britain's friendship. That is basic, but Great Britain does not seem to understand the situation. She is now summoning all the chiefs, etc., of the coast from Aden to Kuwait to discuss closer administration of their common interests under British control. Then she has her arrangements with Trans-Jordan and 'Iraq. Now why doesn't she send a commission or representative round all the Arab countries (not one of the officials employed in these parts but one from London directly representing the central Government) to ascertain how best to create an unified Arab world with British friendship as its cardinal article of policy. I guarantee I could give such a representative an idea of how to achieve such an aim without enforcing any sacrifice of local independence by any of the units of the Arab world. But England has still her Imperialism to cater for and, while she talks of giving independence to India, she is engaged in raking up a confederation of petty chiefs along the Arabian coast to form another imperial unit. And moreover she is afraid of me—she does not know what I might do if ever I became great and powerful. But I assure you I covet not an inch of territory beyond what I have. I have no duty to the Arabs and nothing to fear from them. I am perfectly content to be as I am and to serve my God and the interests of my own country."

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

This was, of course, more a cry of despair than an honest declaration of personal feeling. The clock had certainly gone back during these last two years, and the reason was that the King had been left to stand single-handed with no single strong brave man to help him by telling the truth. Even then, Yusuf just echoed the royal tirade while Khalid, heaven knows why, uttered his conviction that many Arabs in Syria and elsewhere were only too anxious to come under *Wahhabi* rule if the Mandatory Powers would but leave the way clear. I kept silence for a while, being of late become pessimistic of the King's capacity to listen to plain speaking. The King then sought to draw me out but stifled me as soon as I began to develop the argument that, by failure to establish close and direct diplomatic relations with the representatives of the Powers at Jidda, he had thrown away all the advantage (of a close understanding) promised by the raising of all the Consulates to the rank of Legations. "Why not talk to them (and particularly to the British Minister) freely and frequently and informally on all subjects as you used to talk to me when I occupied a similar position with you?" "What! would you have me tell him that their officials in the Persian Gulf are a rotten lot? It is by speaking freely on such subjects that I have made them my enemies. And, after all, do not they all hate you on account of your clinging to me?"

Yet that was nevertheless the core of all the trouble. Ibn Sa'ud had not yet been able to establish personal relations of genuine cordiality and familiarity with the stranger within his gate. One could scarcely wonder if, on the whole, their reports and recommendations had an anti-*Wahhabi* bias, however slight. And the fact remains that the *Wahhabi* monarch stood alone confronting the concert of the World's Powers. For all his personal charm, lavish hospitality, profuse generosity and deep integrity, he had no friends among the political entities of the world, while within his own realm he met with nothing but fawning and flattery simply because he had too often belayed the truth with the whips of his ill humour. The great Arab Cause seemed to be drifting to the brink of the worst form of disaster—moral and political impotence. There was only one man

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

capable of making the effort necessary to save it, and for the moment he seemed to be wrapped in the slumber of disappointment and inaction. Never before was resolute action more needed in Arabia and never had there been less sign of it far and wide.

An excellent illustration of the impotence pervading the whole regime at this time was the manner in which the wireless problem had been tackled. For some months after the arrival of the engineers and material nothing was done to get the prescribed stations built, and all the energies of all concerned were devoted to ill-informed criticism of the mobile sets. In due course we had managed to get orders from Faisal to the effect that two of the mobile sets should go to Riyadh and the other two to Taïf. These orders were carried out, and on 19th August the mobile sets at Riyadh were in communication with those at Taïf. The folk at Taïf were sufficiently moved by an event so historic to send a number of congratulatory telegrams to the King, but at Riyadh (in spite of a persisting undercurrent of hostility to these inventions of the devil) one might have thought that wireless communication had been in vogue for centuries—at any rate not a word of royal thanks or royal congratulations or even an expression of royal approval. Even a press telegram drafted by me for despatch to the *Daily Herald* and merely announcing the linking up of the *Wahhabi* capital with the rest of the world was held up so long that there remained no point in sending it. All through these days I heard no word of satisfaction at the successful establishment of rapid communication in a country which had so long used the camel and yet found motor-transport (for mails, etc.) painfully slow. But, if a particle of dust got into a carburettor, or any other minor incident of the kind to which all machines are liable occurred, it was loudly declared by Yusuf and the King that the set in question was out of order. And it was useless pointing out that both sets were in fact in perfect order at the very moment of speaking. His Majesty had but to walk over or drive to the place to test the truth of such stories, but he preferred to bluster and rage. My position inevitably became more and more difficult, but there was nothing for it but to stick to

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

my guns in the certain knowledge that time would cure all temporary troubles, though this trouble over the wireless following so close on my audacious attitude over the messed-up currency question made it less and less likely that I should or could (and I cannot say that I even wanted to) recover my old pre-pilgrimage position in the King's counsels. Without any official functions I was in effect an unofficial member of the Privy Council, but I myself had relinquished that position by refusal to attend an important meeting to discuss the currency question soon after the pilgrimage and by frequent absences from the King's evening audiences.

Such was life during those rather dreary days. I managed to secure one morning to myself for a good bout of butterfly hunting in the 'Atna garden between the new Qiri quarter (a palm-grove when I was here in 1917-18) and the Wusaita garden whose palms were then destined to be felled to make room for more residences. The 'Atna garden was to be the site of the new wireless station and garage. I had been greatly surprised by the paucity of insects at light during the night on the palace roof, but in the lucerne of the 'Atna garden there were butterflies in plenty—mostly "blues" (of two or three kinds) and a species of "white"—and also grasshoppers. I enjoyed my morning among them collecting about seventy butterflies and some thirty or more grasshoppers. That afternoon (26th August) the usual routine was varied as the King had been invited to dine at one of the gardens outside the west wall of the city. There also were we bidden, and thither Yusuf, Khalid and I duly walked in the heat of the afternoon. It was a pleasant change to sit in a garden instead of the palace at Badi'a and the meal was a regular feast, after which we repaired to the 'Atna garden for the King to see the site of the wireless station to be. There we prayed the sunset prayer and ate of the Wusaita dates while the King gave orders for the building of walls and bastions.

The routine I have generally described above was subject to drastic modification on Fridays. From about 8 to 9 a.m. the King sat in private audience in Yusuf's room and then retired to make ready for the *Juma'* prayer, at about 11.30 to 11.40 at

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

this season. The population of Riyadh had so outgrown the capacity of the *Jami'* or chief mosque that two other mosques had been made available as *Jami's*. The floor of the main *Jami'* opposite the palace is paved with hard gravel as are all the mosque floors at Riyadh, but the King attends the congregational prayer in his private oratory, a long narrow chamber built on the roof of the mosque from its south corner to about half-way along the south-west wall and connected to the main palace building (west end) by a viaduct carried on pillars. Here Yusuf, Khalid and I gathered with the King's henchmen as early as about 10 or 10.15 a.m. After the usual two-bow *Sunna* one sat reading or reciting the *Quran* and the din of discordant voices was tremendous. In due course the King, with members of his family (then generally including Mansur) entered and he took up his position before the *Mihrab*, which is an upward continuation of the main *Mihrab* of the mosque oriented at seven degrees south of west, whereas the true *Qibla* direction should be WSW (245 degrees)—a fact which had caused a deal of argument between myself and the King in the winter, but which had ceased to be a matter of controversy, though it must be a little disturbing to the strict *Wahhabi* to realize (if he is prepared to face the truth) that instead of facing towards that part of the *Ka'ba* which lies between the door and the Black Stone (as is fondly believed even by the King) he is confronting a point very far north of Mecca and not so very far south of Madina! The King having performed his *Sunna* prostrations and joined the chorus of reciters, the din continued until the first sound of the *muadhdhin's* voice when a sudden hush fell on the whole assembly above and below. The deep-throated baying of the *muadhdhin* then broadcast the call to prayer and, when he had done, the thin, querulous, somewhat nasal stream of the *Khatib's* voice held the field with the sermon, having completed which he would recite the usual collect, whereupon the *Iqama* would be uttered by a very hale-and-heartily-voiced person in almost conversational tones. Then followed the two *Rik'ats* of the *Jum'a* prayer, after which we prayed two *rik'ats* of *Sunna*, and sat about till the King was done with his rather longer devotions. After the service, the

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

King sat awhile in public audience to receive visitors, and the world was then free to disperse, dine and sleep or otherwise pass the afternoon.

On Fridays the King generally paid a visit to the great cemetery, one of several in the immediate neighbourhood of the capital and dating from the reign of Faisal, who was apparently the first member of the royal family to be interred here, while his father Turki lies in the old cemetery outside the north wall and Dhuhairi gate. The new cemetery occupies a considerable area on the left bank of the Batha and has neither gate nor wall, with the inevitable result that the graves are often defiled by dogs and other trespassers. On the second Friday after my arrival I accompanied the King on this visit. Arriving at the cemetery by car, we left our sandals outside the graveyard limits and did the round (rather painfully in parts) barefooted, the royal chaplain Shaikh Muhammad ibn Hamad al Faris serving as conductor to the King and naming to him the occupants of the graves to be specially visited. Among those thus honoured—incidentally the occasional visiting of graveyards was approved by the Prophet as a means of reminding the living of their ultimate fate, though any tendency to hero-worship of the dust of the departed is strongly discouraged by the code and practices of the *Wahhabis*—were all the departed *Mashaikh* or chief priests of Riyadh, the descendants of the great Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Wahhab and their disciples in learning. These shaikhly tombs always struck me as having a distinctly emotional effect on the King, who doubtless regarded the saints of the true faith as sure and certain inmates of Paradise as a reward for their work in this world. Other graves were those of his mother, his son Fahad (died 1919), his eldest son and one-time heir Turki (died 1919) next door, as it were, to the beautiful Janhara (died 1919), once queen of all this desert world. Then there was his father 'Abdul Rahman in a relatively well-kept grave—none of the graves have inscribed headstones or other ornaments but some are better trimmed with stone slabs than others—and not far off Faisal himself with his eldest son and successor 'Abdullah next to him. Another deceased wife was the mother of Faisal, viceroy of the Hijaz, and so on

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

till we came again to the cars and drove to some hillocks near the grotto of Al Makhruq to dawdle away time till sunset, when we prayed and drank coffee at the Shamsiya country house of Sa'ud al 'Arafa. Sa'ud the son of Faisal, Faisal the son of 'Abdul Rahman, and various other members of the royal family lie in the old cemetery round Turki, close to the original site of the first settlement of Riyadh, the well and garden of Hajr al Yamama.

A day or two later I met a man going for the last time to the cemetery as I was wending my way through the new Qiri quarter to the little hospital-dispensary started here in 1929, which had already more than justified its existence if one can judge such things by the attendance register. I had arranged with Dr Ahmad Yasin and his apothecary, Dr Nadim, to visit them at the scene of their work and I did indeed find them in the thick of it. A member of the King's entourage was the patient actually being attended to at the moment. I shook hands with him also and discovered when I had taken the seat of honour vacated by him that he was suffering from syphilis, which he had picked up ten years before at Kuwait and for which he had been treated both there and at Mecca, though this was his first visit to the Riyadh hospital. I witnessed the injection of a good dose of neosalvarsan into a vein of his arm, whereupon, receiving some stuff to rub on the actual sores, he went off with instructions to return for another injection in a week. During that year (roughly from 15th December to 15th July, or seven months) the total number of patients had been 9,780 or about 1,400 a month, a daily average of just under fifty. In Rabi' al Awwal, however, the figures had gone up alarmingly with a widespread outbreak of dengue, and the figure for the period 16th July to the end of August was approximately 3,320, giving a rate of about seventy patients a day. As for syphilis, I got the figures for three months showing a total of 193 syphilis patients out of a grand total of 3,840 visitors in all or roughly a proportion of 5 per cent. Tuberculosis and smallpox (with occasional epidemics of dengue) were the worst scourges of the land, while eye troubles of various kinds gave the doctor practically all the surgical work he was

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

equipped for. They had certainly no lack of medicines and supplies, but the time was not yet for a full-dress hospital at Riyadh, much to the chagrin of Dr Ahmad Yasin, whose three years' contract was nearly up and who, needless to say, did not propose to spend the rest of his life at Riyadh.

Day after day the rather dull routine of afternoon life at the Badi'a palace went on and I was beginning to get a little tired of it, when slight variations began to manifest themselves. One afternoon, for instance, the King accepted an invitation to dine in one of the western gardens of Riyadh. Then, after dinner at Badi'a on another afternoon, he sallied forth to the neighbouring garden, called Al Mahatta (or Al Muhattaf), reputed to be the site of defence works thrown up by the Dar'iya *Wahhabis* of the eighteenth century to meet the attack of the Najran forces under Hasan ibn Hibbatullah, which were repulsed and ultimately defeated with great slaughter at Ha'ir, so named from the evaporation of the pools of blood in its depression. In this garden there was a large and presumably ancient fig-tree with but poor fruit that season, though the King remembered seeing on it a year or two before figs of enormous size dripping with rich juice. Some of the old palms (an extreme age for a date-palm is 150 years) here had been rooted up by recent floods, and here and there had been replaced by young plants, but the garden was more like a forest than anything else, and the fruit trees—peach, apple and vine—were crowded together in unpruned confusion. Another day the King after dinner repaired to a garden up the valley on the left bank, belonging to Ibn Mutrif, one of his henchmen. It looked exceedingly attractive with the tall stems of the palms growing out of a half-cut field of *dhurra* (millet), grown and cut for fodder. Ibn Mutrif, now an old man though still hale and hearty, was formerly the King's standard-bearer, and His Majesty always addressed him affectionately as "Nuncle." In many a fray he had carried the colours of his sovereign, and many the wounds he had to show for his pains. His son, a slim, well-built, good-looking lad with slightly curly black hair, had some four or five years before taken up motoring and was now in the King's service as one of the royal chauffeurs.

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

'For several kilometres up and down from Badi'a the Batin is dotted on both sides with palm-groves in the rich alluvium deposited by the seasonal torrents. They said that that year the flood had come down no fewer than twenty-four times, continuing on one or two occasions to flow for two days without a break. In parts, the side of the torrent-bed is strongly revetted with masonry blocks from the limestone of the cliffs, and the middle of the stream-bed is of sand and gravel—altogether a very charming valley and at that time full of *Badawin* tents.

Of all the groves none can beat the Badi'a garden, which was being planted with palms when I was there fourteen years before. It appeared to belong to the Amir Sa'ud, who claimed to have 1,200 palm-stems all in their very prime of fertility. At the further end of the garden from the palms was the well on which Sa'ud had erected two 8 h.p. Petter engines with Aquatole chain-pumps in replacement of the asses or camels that once walked up and down the abandoned *Majarr*. Using a tin of kerosene every eight hours these two pumps work simultaneously for twenty hours a day during the hot summer months when the palms are extra thirsty. A part of the garden is shut off from the main section as a fruit orchard where vines, peach-trees, etc., have been planted, though that year, as already noted, all the fruit crops failed. One day we were served after the evening prayer, when the King was wont to have dates in the *Laun* stage set before him—just eating one or two and washing it down with a draught of the delicious water of the Batin,—with the *Jummar* or heart of the date-palm, the cutting of which, of course, involves the death of the tree—therefore a very great luxury, with something of the crispness of celery and a pleasant, rather undefinable, sweetish taste.

The door of the garden was always kept locked as it was a pleasaunce for the ladies of the palace and their hand-maidens whom, when admitted hastily without warning, as we often were, we saw fleeing through the greenery to escape the invasion of men. But the foliage was dense enough to give them ample concealment, though on one or two occasions, when Ibn Sa'ud organized a game somewhat resembling touch—

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

with a half-blind slave and stout *jarid*-stick chasing the rest without any ceremony and laying about him lustily on such as he caught—I, and doubtless others, came across and scattered beves of veiled maidens. It always struck me as amazing that the King did not make more use of this lovely garden either for his ordinary afternoon sittings or when with his women, but he had become terribly addicted to the indoor life, which certainly did not improve his health. It was probably nothing more than a lack of energy to decide to do something different from the daily routine. On another occasion the King was bidden to dinner, as usual in the late afternoon, by various members of the Sudairi family, long linked with the House of Sa'ud by a veritable network of intermarriage. One of the King's wives at this time was the daughter of the Sudairi patriarch, Ahmad, a charming old man who had long been one of the King's most loyal supporters. A motor-car (or more than one) had recently been sent to his home at Ghat in the Sudair province (from which the family derives its name) to bring the old man on a visit to his daughter at Riyadh; and it was to celebrate his arrival that this picnic-dinner had been arranged in the family palm-groves at Masani', a suburb-oasis of the capital. It was indeed a lovely garden with its trellised vines and massed peach-trees in the shade of the tall palms rising out of a veritable riot of grass and weeds, on which the sumptuous banquet was spread out on a huge white cloth. The old man had brought two of his younger sons with him, the contemporaries of the King's Sudairi sons—Fahad and Sultan—and of a Sudairi nephew, 'Abdullah, the son of his brother Muhammad, whose divorced wife became the wife of the King and the mother of Fahad. It may sound somewhat complicated, but the matrimonial affairs of the *Wahhabi* royal family are extremely complex.

Among others present on this occasion was the renowned Shaikh, 'Abdullah ibn Hazm, less like an ecclesiastic than any of the other great *Mashaikh*, but none the less a doughty champion of the faith. On the way from the Batin to Masani' we had passed, near Muhammad's 'Ataiqiya estate, the garden of Shaikh 'Abdul Latif (actually mentioned by Palgrave who,

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

however, places it north-east of Riyadh instead of south or south-east!), and the King had gone off into ecstatic raptures over the original planter's son, 'Abdullah, the greatest of all recent *Mashaikh* and as wise in political counsel as learned in ecclesiastical lore. It was, indeed, he that had ever been at the young ruler's right hand throughout all that early period of his progress to greatness, and the King admitted not only with gratitude but enthusiasm as he passed the garden, in which the old man had so often whiled away the day's heat, that he had always found his judgment sane and his counsel wise. This train of thought remained in the royal mind throughout the afternoon; and His Majesty held forth in general on Islamic principles. Whatever may be one's shortcomings, moral and otherwise, one may yet always be a true Muslim and hope for God's mercy in the hereafter, but two things quite definitely exclude one from Islam—the association of any other with God in worship and the deliberate practice of disobedience (*al mujahira bil ma'asi* or ostentatious rebellion). Yet one of the Najd *Mashaikh*, when confronted in Egypt with some practice not in conformity with the *Wahhabi* creed and asked his opinion of it, replied: If I were to do what I see you doing, I should consider myself a *Kafir*. Yet I do not call you infidels, for you do what you do in ignorance, while I would be doing it, knowing it to be wrong.

Masani' is a large area of palms at the southern extremity of the Riyadh oasis and divided by the sandy torrent bed of Wadi Hanifa from the larger garden tract of Manfuha northward. The Wadi at this point is completely spanned by a stout stone dam strengthened with bastion-like buttresses at frequent intervals to divert the floods into the Manfuha and Masani' palm-groves. One such grove in the latter the King had recently purchased for 21,000 *Riyals*—the Maria Theresa *Riyal* was at this period at just over nineteen to the £ sterling—to be a birthright for Mansur and his mother. The Masani' village, never very large, seemed to me to have dwindled in size, while the village of Manfuha—the pathetic residue of a once great city by Arabian reckoning, whose gaunt walls still spread out over an enormous area in intermittent lines of ruin and decay

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

—seemed to have reached almost its last gasp. It looked deserted and, was in fact, deserted or almost so, the explanation being as curious as it was simple. In olden days people had been forced to congregate together in towns and villages for mutual protection against the prevailing insecurity and had built walls and kept them in repair. The peace of modern times had resulted in an universal flight to the palm-groves with a resultant break-up of the village community, which was now satisfied with Riyadh as the great shopping-centre to be visited according to requirements. For the rest, each family was content to be self-contained in its agricultural independence and poverty, seeking neither the diversion of society nor moral or material progress. Food and water were the bare minimum for existence. Beyond that the male sought out a female to amuse him and bear his progeny—an animal existence without other relief than the dim light shining on the dead souls of these folk from the distant beacon of the true faith. My mind at this period would ever recur to the failure of Ibn Sa'ud's government to face and master its economic crisis, with the inevitable result that trade and business were dead in the land. The only bright spot, indeed, was the quite remarkable determination of the King (and perhaps also of the Hijaz Government, though its chief economy lay in declining to pay due debts and therefore in being unable to purchase goods on credit as before) to economize to the bone. The evidences of economy at Riyadh were too palpable to be overlooked. Even the royal kitchen had fallen on bad days, and the meals served from it fell far short of the usual high (though simple) standard. The milk was often 50 per cent watered, and the dates that came to our quarters were (quite inexcusably) the mere leavings of slaves through whose hands they had passed.

Every evidence of economy was, however, welcome, and it was in connection with this subject that one evening (12th September, 1931), after the '*Isha*' prayer, we being foregathered with the King on his private roof while he dealt with correspondence for the outgoing Hasa mail, I had the pleasure of hearing him dictate a long letter, as charming in manner as it was masterly in matter, to 'Abdullah ibn Jiluwi

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

in reply to a somewhat querulous screed on the subject of the economizing activities and general interference of the recently appointed revenue commission of the Hasa, consisting of Shaikh Muhammad at Tawil and Ibrahim ibn Mu'ammār. As a matter of fact the Hasa, said the King, is being governed with astonishing economy, the monthly cost of the whole administration amounting to no more than 15,000 M.T. *Riyals*. But system was necessary and Ibn Sa'ud, in dictating this part of the letter, showed himself a real master of his subject as well as a born ruler. It was left to 'Abdullah ibn Jiluwi to fix the monthly allowance requisite for himself and his family, and the sum so fixed was to be paid to him monthly by the Treasury without question and not to be subject to audit or other investigation. The expenses of hospitality should, however, henceforth be provided by the Treasury, and the governor would only be responsible to see that the food provided was up to standard. *Badawin* visitors were to get so much dates, rice, *samn* (*dihan* as he called it) and coffee for every five persons whether the deputation consisted of five or 100 or 1,000 persons and meat should be provided in accordance with the recognized existing practice—none for people of no account, a sheep for a party worthy and large enough, a camel for a large party accompanying a notable visitor. On the other hand non-*Badu* hospitality, similarly to be controlled by the Finance Department, would be dispensed in two guest-houses, respectively for guests of high degree, and for servants and those of no account. In all cases the right of hospitality should be strictly limited to the customary three days except in the case of those who had very important business. "For instance," quoth the King, continuing to dictate, "the other day the entertainment of So-and-so" (naming some *Badawin* chief) "cost 2,000 *Riyals* whereas surely 150 to 200 *Riyals* would amply represent his worth." Thus, skilfully but with a minimum of actual disturbance, he disentangled the confused mix-up of private and public expenditure, which is a feature of old-time Oriental administration, to leave the road clear for reform in the future without hurting the feelings of one of the old school, loyal to the core, who had done good service under the old conditions and rather resented

The Queen of the Desert—Riyadh

the new-fangled ways of modern administration. But the King, after all, called upon him to do nothing that was not already being done at Riyadh in the general interests of the State. Ibn Sa'ud was manifestly a master of his craft when he was dealing with the internal affairs of Arabia and its people who had been his life's study. He disappointed only when he left his proper ground for the strange terrain of finance and economics.

The Badi'a afternoon routine was varied by a slight diversion on two successive days about this time, two of the royal slaves (or freemen) being put up to do some extraordinarily amateurish clowning which kept the company laughing and was not altogether unamusing even to a more sophisticated spectator. At first the pair acted an incipient dog-fight with the usual (but entirely unobscene) antics of dogs on such occasions, with much barking and growling; the scene then changed and the performers acted respectively the parts of a donkey and a blind man—not very original or amusing. And how I longed to suggest that, if such innocent fun was not *haram*, they could find it of much better quality abroad or even in films which could be censored to deny admission to anything improper! Yet the same evening, while we were sitting about on the roof after the sunset prayer, we heard from afar off the voice of one yodelling some familiar (*Badawin*) air, and the King was sufficiently shocked to send off two myrmidons in a car to seek him out and beat (*taqq*) him—which was duly done as evidenced by the distant cry of pain that formed the climax of the tune. "If one relaxes one's strictness for a moment," said His Majesty, "one never knows to what lengths people will go. Last night Ibn Fadhliya started a song as we were driving in from Badi'a and, as we took no serious notice of the offence, here it is being repeated. Wakeful, indeed, is the devil to snare mankind!"

QARNAIT—THE CORONET

VISITORS to Taïf from the sultry plain of the Tihama and the heated foothills about Mecca are fond of making short excursions to the many delightful valleys and ravines hidden away amid the folds formed by the summits and eastern flanks of the main range of the Hijaz. Liya, famous for its pomegranates, is a favourite resort of such holiday-makers, while others prefer Wadi Mahram and Hada owing to their greater accessibility on the Mecca road. Wahat and Wuhait are frequently visited by week-enders or people who can only spend a day away from town. But of all the places available for the delectation of the annual summer-visitors to Taïf none is spoken of with more enthusiasm than the district vaguely known as Al Shifa, whose prickly pears are matchless in all Arabia—perhaps in all the world, and whose valleys have a climate both cooler and more agreeable than that of Taïf, which is held to be excessively dry and therefore not suitable to all constitutions. In the higher valleys there is a welcome tempering of the climatic dryness with dew or humidity drawn from the plentiful surface or sub-surface water of sandy ravines which form the catchment area of the monsoon or other rains.

In the autumn of 1930 I had visited many of the outlying valleys including Wadi Liya, Wadi Mahram and Hada; but I had not been able to find time for the Shifa and it was accident rather than design that had in October 1931, facilitated an excursion to which I had always looked forward. I had spent three or four days at Taïf and had been reduced to a state of despair by the almost universal atmosphere of depression prevailing in official and unofficial circles and at the Viceregal Court. The financial and economic crisis was at its worst. Everybody seemed to agree that the *fons et origo mali* was the Finance Minister, 'Abdullah al Sulaiman, and his department; but nobody seemed to be able to do anything to put things right. Meanwhile the officials of the Finance Department alone drew their salaries and other generous allowances with great

regularity, while those of all other departments were badly in arrears—as much as six or seven months in most cases—and poverty was both universal and acutely felt. I felt that I must get away from such an atmosphere at all costs and decided in sheer desperation to return to the heat of Mecca and solitude rather than remain in a pleasanter climate where conversation was unremittingly desolate. Having so decided, I conceived the attractive idea of wandering alone in the high places of the Hijaz if arrangements could be made rapidly and without too much trouble. And it so happened that the scheme almost arranged itself. Saiyid Hamza Ghauth, whose guest I had been these few days of my sojourn at Taïf, was able to find at once a man who could settle everything for a visit to the Shifa. He appeared with a couple of donkey-men in the morning of 14th October, and it was arranged that I should start with one of the latter, by name Muhaisin and of the Quraish tribe, and my Riyadh servant, 'Abdul Latif, with two asses, the same afternoon after lunch. Each of the asses was to cost one and a half *Riyals* a day, including the company and services of Muhaisin—nominally 3s., but actually 1s. 6d., owing to the parlous condition of the *Riyal* in the markets of the Hijaz. 'Abdul Latif was duly sent out to the *Suq* to buy a teapot with a reasonable quantity of tea and sugar, while for the rest we would live on the country or endure hunger—an unlikely contingency. By midday all was ready and the asses at the door. Hamza duly returned from the usual daily sitting of the Advisory Council for lunch; and at 3 p.m. my small party started off, our exit from the town being by the gate adjacent to the mosque of Ibn 'Abbas. Muhaisin, an unintelligent, unconversational individual, much addicted to the smoking of cigarettes, of which he had laid in a store (cigarette papers and native green tobacco from the Yaman) on the strength of the payment by me in advance of one day's hire for his two asses, walked, but kept up with the steady amble of his animals without any apparent difficulty.

Unfortunately—a fact which we ought to have ascertained in advance, but unaccountably failed to do so—he had never in his life been to the Shifa though his home was amid the valleys

Qarnait—The Coronet

and ridges of Habala on the Taïf-Mecca road. He was consequently quite useless as an impartor of geographical knowledge and almost equally so as a guide, though we had the good fortune about half-way through the afternoon's march to meet a herding woman who was able to direct us on the way to the Shifa before we had gone far enough to matter up a valley which would have eventually landed us in or near Wadi Liya in the opposite direction.

After issuing forth by the Ibn 'Abbas gate our course lay roughly southward up the valley in which lie the Taïf garden-suburbs of Hawaya, Shahar and Qarahin in that order upwards. After passing the last-named settlement we gradually diverged from the valley across the low rough spurs of a ridge to our right until we fell into another rough torrent-bed, at the upper end of which we came to some stone-walled gardens and a few houses or huts of similar rough masonry—the settlement of Al Qasr with numerous well-grown *Sidr* trees (*Jujuba spina Christi*) in the midst of extensive patches of *Dukhn* (millet) and *Barshumi* (prickly pear).

We had now been marching about an hour and had covered perhaps eight kilometres. The track here entered an area of foothills in which red granite, quartz and hornblende were the predominating elements, and very soon afterwards bent round to the right at a point from which we had our last glimpse of the prominent white minaret of the Ibn 'Abbas mosque, on which I had hitherto been taking bearings. A little way on we passed a low masonry wayside prayer-place on a col between numerous kopje-like hills, on one of which I noticed the ruins of an old (Turkish) road-post.

At this point we may have risen some 200 to 300 feet above the level of Taïf, and were close to the valley of Al 'Asb which we soon entered, after making about twelve kilometres from the start. We followed it upwards in a south-westerly direction—marching upon a torrent-bed of soft reddish granite grit and sand, some thirty yards wide on the average between the natural rock of the ridge forming its left bank and a long ruinous retaining wall of rough masonry. Well-grown trees of *Salam* (acacia) were scattered profusely about the valley which

became more rocky and boulder-strewn as we advanced up it from a restricted area of terraced fields with a few stone huts somewhat downstream of our point of entry. Here and there about twenty feet above the torrent-bed on the slope of its rocky right bank one could see the remains, continuous for considerable lengths at a time, of what was probably an ancient aqueduct; it may possibly have been a built-up track for horses and mules. And about two kilometres above our point of entry we came to the lower end of a running, though sluggish and intermittent, stream, which we traced to its faint beginnings about a kilometre further up the valley, where the subsoil water was close under the surface. A little below this point we had come across a remarkable masonry dam, about thirty feet high and constructed of rude blocks of red granite, extending about two-thirds of the way across the valley, which was here perhaps only fifty metres wide, between steep rocky banks. I imagine that the breach of this dam by some mighty flood must have taken place far back in the dim past, and that perhaps the aqueduct already referred to was meant for the conveyance of its ponded waters to irrigate fields lower down. And it may be remarked here that the whole of this Shifa country shows extensive signs of human handiwork in the shape of dams and terraced fields, which were doubtless in origin the work of long-forgotten generations and are still to a great extent in use for their original irrigational purpose, though it seemed to me that in many cases breaches of such dams and walls have proved too much for the reduced engineering capacity of the hardy but hard-hit moderns.

From the dam our course lay more to west-south-west up a valley with a broad, sandy bed and a regular forest of *Salam* trees, the juniper-clad slopes of the mountain called Daka lying straight in front of us far ahead. A little way further up a broad tributary valley came into Al 'Asb from almost due south, and our donkey-man confidently directed us up it until enquiries discreetly made of a shepherdess showed him his error, again before we had gone far enough to matter. The path up this valley would have led us over a ridge to some valley on the other side flowing down to Wadi Liya, into

which Al 'Asb also flows—in the opposite direction to our course. Returning to the main valley, we followed it up through the thick *Salam* forest, and for a while found ourselves marching along a masonry wall separating the torrent-bed from the slope of the valley's left bank. Far up on the hillside, green with various bushes, we saw a large flock of white sheep; and soon after we came to another splendid dam of rough masonry, twelve feet high and the same in thickness, extending across the valley except for about fifteen yards where, close under the left bank, floods had evidently carried away part of it. We now worked gradually away from the torrent-bed, our track running south-west up the slope of the left bank, to a low col on which I noticed two short and worn Arabic inscriptions on blocks of horneblende. The path itself was like an exceedingly rough knife-edge formed by the slate-like lie of the red granite, which is the primeval foundation of all this land from Taif to the escarpment and its great peaks.

So we continued gradually rising to the watershed between the 'Asb and 'Urala valleys, which I reckoned roughly by the aneroid to be about 350 feet above our point of entry into the former, which we had followed for an hour-and-a-half (perhaps twelve kilometres). Below us, as we now descended from the col, lay a splendid coomb of *Salam* trees through which, on its southerly course to Wadi Liya, ran the 'Urala valley, among whose shaded sands we passed a considerable flock of black and white sheep. We crossed the torrent-bed and in the deepening gloaming climbed up the steep rough western slope of the valley to its summit from which, as much to our guide's surprise as ours, we saw or, in the dusk, half saw the settlement of 'Amt, a group or two of stone-built huts with a square tower of attractive appearance in the midst of a number of terraced fields. It was with some difficulty that in the dark we found a track leading through the maze of walled or embanked fields to a small group of huts where the true instinct of our guide led him to expect a welcome for the night. Two vicious black dogs barked furiously to give warning of our approach, but in a few minutes we had safely passed by them and entered the hall (and obviously main, if not only, living-room) of our host-to-

Qarnait—The Coronet

be, one Salih ibn 'Ammar, the second son of the absent owner of these few acres of highland valley. We were kept waiting a few moments outside until the women-folk had been cleared out into the neighbouring kitchen, but we were soon comfortably settled into the room and it was not long before supper was set before us—girdle-bread cooked in *saman* (butter) with honey of the mountains. We then retired to the little wattle-roofed half-open mosque outside and a few feet higher up than the main building, which was to be our dormitory, while the hall, thus vacated by us, was doubtless restored to the use of the family for its night's rest.

We were here some 800 feet above Taïf, but the minimum temperature of the night was as high as seventeen degrees centigrade, or rather higher than that of Taïf itself during the previous night or two—our first night there had indeed distinguished itself with a low temperature of 8.5 degrees. The house of Ahmad ibn 'Ammar, father of Salih, was in the smaller of the two hamlets of the settlement—the larger being a group of a dozen huts with the tower (*Husn*) aforesaid at the foot of a pyramid hillock called Taftaris. The 'Amt valley runs slightly north of west—eventually to Wuhait—and is joined between the two hamlets by the narrower ravine valley of Sha'ib Sabra, also with terraced fields, coming from somewhat east of south. We saw evidence here of the rough carpet (*Shamla*) weaving, which is an established industry of the Hijaz mountains, and rugs of their making were provided for 'Abdul Latif and Muhaisin the donkey-man. The latter, a *Quraishi* from near Hada, wore the same ochre-coloured garments as our host, a kilted smock reaching only to the knees and stained with a dye made from the root-bark of the *Sidr* tree boiled or soaked in water. The men of these parts are uniformly slim with thin shanks, good-looking for the most part and jaunty of gait. Salih and the other inhabitants of 'Amt are of the Bani Sufyan (Al Hajja section). He had obviously been brought up in a hard school of life and betrayed his early training in a sharp, rapid manner, half nervous and half dominating. He agreed to accompany us for the rest of our journey for two *Riyals* a day, and often made a nuisance of

Qarnait—The Coronet

himself by trying to direct our movements to suit his own taste or convenience rather than ours. Except in one important matter, however, I was generally able to out-general him, though he got his own back on me each night by suggesting to our hosts that if they slaughtered a sheep for our dinner it would not be at their own expense. And at dinner he proved an active and energetic performer, chopping away with short sharp strokes of his knife with one hand and with the other consigning about as much to his own mouth as he distributed to the rest of us. He was an interesting though not altogether pleasing character, obviously accustomed to a fair measure of success in the struggle for life in these poverty-stricken highlands. Yet I should admit to his credit that, while driving a hard enough bargain for his future services as guide—one *Riyal* a day would have been ample pay under the prevailing conditions—he declined to accept payment for his bread and honey hospitality. Like many of his kind he was economical of speech, often using a mixture of gestures and grunts to express the contents of a sentence, and, often, when one asked him what he was saying to one of the others, he answered with apparent but not intended rudeness, "*Mash*," which, being interpreted, means "nothing." Yet there were moments when I quite enjoyed his society within the narrow limits of his own sectional domain, outside of which he knew practically nothing of the local geography and nomenclature though he would not admit the fact and was content to use vague names for places which obviously had more specific labels than, for instance, Fara' and Harjal.

I was up betimes the next morning to inspect our surroundings before the breakfast of bread (a large circular bun warm from the oven) and honey or *saman*, according to taste, which was to speed us on our way. The whole valley within the circuit of the settlement was blocked by dams of masonry or earth or both, and filled with terraced fields which looked very bare, for the season's wheat had long been reaped and the next sowing would not be due till November. The prickly-pear was much in evidence—the Shifa is famous for this product and excellent fruit it is though dirt-cheap at a camel-load for the equivalent

Qarnait—The Coronet

of 2s. or 3s.—but the season was over and there were but odd trees of fig, pomegranate, etc., about the place. The huts or hovels of the two hamlets were of rude granite masonry and presented no feature of interest, but the Husn or tower of defence, typical of all the Shifa country as I was to discover during the next few days, deserves a full description to serve for all the many other specimens of its kind to be noted hereafter. About twenty to twenty-five feet square at the foot and slightly less at the base of the cornice, these towers are firmly founded on the granite bed-rock and built up very neatly with rough-hewn granite slabs without any kind of mortar to bind them so far as I could see. The door-jambs are greater blocks, four or five feet high, surmounted by a low lintel, and the door is of solid roughly-cut timber. About three feet below the top a cornice of black slabs (of horneblende) projects all round about a foot or eighteen inches, supporting an attractive parapet of black and white (quartz) masonry worked roughly into a stepped-pinnacle pattern. In the cornice exactly above the door is a hole for the use of defenders against assault on the only possible entrance. These towers are apparently only used for defence against enemy attacks, and in times of peace, as at present, they remain locked and untenanted while the owner and his family with their menagerie of camels, sheep, chickens, dogs, cats and other creatures prefer the single-storey sheds and open yards grouped round their base. It struck me as strange, after I had seen some dozen of these towers, that this quite distinctive type of architecture should have been developed in so limited an area, while presumably similar conditions of anarchy should have failed to reproduce such a feature anywhere, so far as I know, outside the Bani Sufyan country. It is certainly most attractive, and a thrill of pleasure went through me every time my eye lighted on such a tower in the wild glens of these highlands.

About 7 a.m. we started off up the 'Amt valley, Salih and I walking ahead, while the asses were got ready to follow us. Climbing up a rough hill-track from the head of the *wadi* we began to get wider glimpses of the surrounding country (including Habala and Ghumair) from a succession of cols, from

Qarnait—The Coronet

the last of which (about 350 feet above 'Amt) we looked down forward to the fields called Sadd, a small settlement of scattered stone huts amid a considerable area of cultivation irrigated from wells. The patches of light green (lucerne and tomatoes) showed up pleasantly against the rugged red of the granite hill-sides and the dark green of the juniper forests now becoming thicker; and there before us rose in all their grandeur the giants of the Hijaz—Qarnait and Daka and Barad and Habala—not mountain ranges, but individual peaks rising up starkly at intervals from the mountain plateau.

On arriving at the valley-bottom we turned aside to pass the time of day with a man working his irrigation team of two cows on a well of about twenty feet depth hewn out of the granite rock. It is a hard life these days, he said (or words to that effect), for an hour or two of plying these kine dries up my well. And people higher up the valley with deeper wells seem to have more water. Ah! would that I had money to sink my well a man's height (*qama*) or two deeper to increase my supply—look at the fields I could cultivate, which now depend on the seasonal floods, and they have been poor of late. Perhaps you have come to help us, he added, eyeing me with curious interest; and I could only comfort him with the reflection that my (or others') study of his needs might some day produce the desired reaction in an apathetic, because hard-pressed Government.

In the midst of the Sadd settlement (belonging to Al Hajja folk) is a granite hill with a huge detached block of rock poised apparently insecurely on its slender summit. They call it Saba, said Salih, and in answer to my question as to its history: It was placed there by God. Beyond it, at the head of the basin, is a surface-pool of water, oozed up from the sand in a hollow, amid a veritable forest of junipers and great boulders of rock, on whose face here and there I noticed rude scratches of pious texts in modern Arabic script. A woman was herding a flock of sheep at the water and sat down under a rock to watch us drink. As I passed I noticed that she had bright eyes and a clear skin, but in this country there is no word of greeting between men and women—and we passed on through the junipers of

Qarnait—The Coronet

the glen. A small caravan, laden with straight stems of juniper for building-rafters, went by on its way to Ta'if from Qarnait, as they said, which is a recognized centre of the economic cultivation of the tree. It only requires regular trimming to grow straight and here at any rate is a local industry which could be developed to compete successfully with the *jandal*-rafters imported every year in great numbers from Zanzibar.

The descent from the next col brought us to a well-made masonry weir, about fifteen feet high, across a ravine running into the valley of Wadi Mantala, whose bed here is occupied by terraced fields with a few stone huts perched up on the slopes of the valley here and there. Apart from Salih's geographical sense the local practice of giving separate names to different reaches of the same tortuous *wadi* made it very difficult to achieve a clear idea of the valley systems in these parts. I was told, however, that Wadi Mantala (or Al Manatil as it is more often called in the plural to embrace a number of small side-ravines forming this particular cultivation-group) eventually flows down to Wadi Liya, and that its upper reaches are none other than Wadi Harjal, to which we would shortly come and which begins its course right up against the edge of the Hijaz escarpment. A ruined fort, of Turkish appearance, surmounted a spur of a ridge overlooking the scene, and some way downstream a meadow of wild thyme suggested the presence of surface water. The Manatil ravines belong to the Sa'd section of Bani Sufyan, which extends from the slopes of Qarnait northward to Al Fara' inclusive. The Hajja section lies north and east of this range with Hudhail and Quraish further northward to west and east respectively.

A single ridge divided us from the valley of Wadi Harjal (pronounced Haryal) which we entered at the terraced basin-fields of Sarba, a little hamlet of stone huts. Below the fields lay a scene of comparatively tropical luxuriance centring on a large patch of surface water, practically stagnant and mostly covered with a green oozy slime though, in fact, there was the tiniest trickle of running or creeping water. Around this water were masses of wild thyme, water-cresses and other vegetation, and the air buzzed with insects. The asses, by instinct, halted

Qarnait—The Coronet

in the shade of some *Salam* acacias scenting a siesta, and 'Abdul Latif and Muhaisin followed their example while I prospected for butterflies and Salih for food in the direction of the hamlet, about 200 yards upstream. I was meeting with a considerable measure of success in my quest when he came back to report that he had drawn blank. We had accordingly decided to move on upstream towards the Harjal settlement, when out of the emptiness around us there appeared a group of women and children watching the activities of my butterfly net from behind a rock at a safe distance. Then appeared a man who, after a discreet conversation with Salih, decided on the risk of offering us his poor hospitality. Poor as they are and suffering severely from that year's drought, these folk of the hills deem it ignoble to sell food and normally get out of the quandary of unexpected guests by apologizing for an empty larder. Yet they have an eye (and do not scruple to take such steps as may be necessary to confirm their estimate) for the main chance. And in our case Salih had doubtless assured our host that we were neither paupers nor misers; so in due course we found hospitable shade under a hedge of fig-trees by the village, while the goodman's family prepared a meal and 'Abdul Latif got ready the tea, which is the only form of food I ever carry with me on such occasions. There is no equal to tea for the way-weary wanderer, while it is rare indeed to wander long in the inhabited parts of Arabia without finding the more solid comforts—often surprisingly bountiful—which one may need from time to time.

While the cooks were at work I was hunting and, in spite of piteous appeals to come out of the sun, continued my quest of insects with much success until they came out bearing a great dish containing a wheaten mess, not unlike porridge, with a pond of *saman* in a central depression. It was good stuff, though personally I don't eat *saman* neat as do the Arabs, who prefer it even to honey! Just before the meal a considerable person in white raiment happened to be passing along the track to Harjal and turned aside to join us. I imagined from his clothing that he was some townsman like myself out on holiday, but I was mistaken as he was no less a person than the *Amir* of Harjal,

Qarnait—The Coronet

Salim by name, who had been to Liya collecting some outstanding debts. After food they produced their long-stemmed *Yamani* pipes and *tumbak* (probably from Hadhramaut), and I enjoyed, turn and turn about with them, a luxury which I had deliberately eschewed to provide for myself. Hereafter I found it everywhere in these parts.

It was nearly 3 p.m. before we resumed our march up the Harjal valley. For some time I walked to snatch butterflies here and there from the wild thyme, which grew profusely along the banks of the channel, in which at intervals, the water appeared on the surface. A pleasant valley it was, running between the juniper-clad slopes. We had been marching about half an hour (say three kilometres, for I checked the paces of these asses later on between Wuhait and Taïf—I had previously done the trip by car—and found it to be from six to six and a half kilometres an hour, going at a steady walk) when we came to the lowest fields of Harjal and the parting of the ways. Salim begged me to bide with him the night and I would have done so gladly, but it might have meant forgoing the ascent of Qarnait on which I had now set my heart (thanks to a casual suggestion of Salih), and which now began to tower up before us in all its majesty. So we turned from the valley up the slope, whose contours we followed ever upward along the side of a ravine called Sunna. Behind us to the right lay the two Husn-towers of Salim's village and before us at a short distance began the terraced fields of Sunna, more than a thousand feet above Taïf, which is some 5,500 feet above sea-level. Salih made desperate efforts to induce me to halt for the night, but I could see huts ahead right up to the foot of Qarnait and insisted on leaving nothing but the actual climb to the morrow. A brief halt to parley with a likely guide to the summit met with complete success, and in a quarter of an hour we were camped about an empty hut—the interior of which I left to my companions while I had my bedding spread outside on a large slab of red granite—in the little hamlet of Gharif perched on the steep flank of the mountain. We were now about 1,500 feet above Taïf and, as I reckoned, perhaps 1,000 feet below the summit on which we hoped to stand next day. Above us the

juniper forest spread over the mountain slope almost to the top; from the valley below a woman led her little flock of sheep to their pen of rocks and brushwood—for safety against wolves—close to our hut; and before I knew what was happening one of the flock was struggling in the hands of strong men offering it to me for food. The hour was late, it could not be cooked in time, but I pleaded in vain for that poor life whose extinction would mean dollars for the owners on the morrow as well as meat for us all that evening. I had much ado to prevent it from being slaughtered across my bedding, and then there was joy in the camp as everyone gathered to lend a hand at the carcase. To the ever-hungry Arab food is the greatest of all institutions. Its preparation is the universal concern and no regrets are wasted over the hours lost in the meticulous roasting and pounding and preparation of coffee. A very old man appeared among us from the huts below and asked for some easement for an aching chest. He talked with the garrulity of an old age that retained no memory of the days and events of youth. For the last five years he had been blind, but Taïf and Mecca—he had not even been to Jidda—had been the limits of his vision of the world.

Dinner disposed of—an inferior ill-cooked meal of mutton and rice—we composed ourselves to sleep, my companions huddled together in the fug of the hut and myself outside under the rich, dark-blue canopy of the starry night. Soon after dawn I awoke to find that the minimum temperature had been 53.5 degrees *Fahrenheit*. Tea and dry bread, warm from the oven, served for breakfast and at 6.30 we started on our climb: myself, Salih and three of the local folk. There was no difficulty about the ascent though my kilt-smocked, barefooted companions had an advantage over myself in ordinary Arab clothing less the *Aba*, and sandals, which I had to discard at intervals to negotiate the considerable patches of bare red granite lying in our path at an angle of forty-five degrees. My tender feet did not like the prickly surface of the rough rock, from which we passed into a gully thick with juniper scrub and trees and wild lavender, which they export to Mecca and Taïf by the camel load—at 2s. or 3s. a load in the market—to be

Qarnait—The Coronet

converted into expensive perfume. They call it *Lurm*, probably meaning *Dhurm*, for the change of Dh for L is a special feature of the Arabic of the Bani Sufyan and probably others of these mountain tribes, who pronounce *Luhr* and *Laif* for *Dhuhr* and *Dhaif* and call one of these valleys indifferently Al Laiq or Al Dhaïq (the narrow), and offered me water with the formula: "*Anta lami?*" (Art thou thirsty? i.e. *Dhami* or *dhamyan* as they would rather say in Najd).

In the gully I resumed my sandals against thorns, wood-splinters and other accidents. We had to force or pick our way through the seldom-disturbed scrub and juniper forest until we came to the main platform of the mountain out of which rise the four summits which from afar give Qarnait its unique appearance and possibly also its name—if we may credit the suggestion made to me in all apparent seriousness, though I know not on what authority, by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that Aelius Gallus, during his Arabian expedition of 24 B.C., likened the summit to a diadem and called it *Coronata*. *Si non e vero e ben trovato*—the likeness is striking enough, though it is nearer, perhaps, to the headwear of a hussar with the eastern and highest double-peak as the up-standing plume.

I noticed among my companions, as we approached this point, some discussion as to which summit we should ascend. I had naturally assumed that we should make for the highest point, but they had now decided among themselves in favour of the more accessible flat-topped western summit; and I cannot help suspecting that there was some superstitious obstacle in the other direction, the remnants perhaps of some old pagan cult. Their statement that the peak of the plume was inaccessible without ropes seemed to me untrue as there appeared to be a chimney overgrown with junipers right up to the summit. I protested, but they were insistent, and I decided that the matter was not worth arguing about as the difference in height between the various peaks was clearly not more than 100 feet. With what seemed to me a sigh of relief they turned aside to the right to negotiate the comparatively easy ascent to the western summit. And looking back over his shoulder one

Qarnait—The Coronet

said to another: There it is, the place of sacrifice! In reply to my curiosity they did not seem disposed to be too communicative, but they did tell me that every year, at the season of *Ramadhan* (*Al 'Umra*), as far as I could get them to be precise, the local people bring up here a cow or bullock to sacrifice. I should have been more persistent, but the moment passed irrevocably, and I missed seeing what was possibly a "high place" of the ancient pagans, leaving a mystery to solve perhaps on another occasion. On such matters, these people, for all the good common-sense of Islam, have tender susceptibilities, and all but one of them shrank from me with horror when I photographed the higher peak from the lower and invited them to make part of the picture.

The summit is all of gaunt, stark, red granite with enormous boulders of the same material tumbled about. A pool of fouled rain-water occupied a scoop in the rock, and a cave formed by a boulder overlying a wide crack in the granite cup was pointed out to me as the den of a wolf. On the way up we had seen the holes of coney (*Wabr*) with the marks of recent dung and staling at their front doors. At length we gained the highest point of the western summit, and a splendid panorama it was that met our eyes. By the aneroid it appeared that we were just about 8,000 feet above sea-level, and I judged that another 100 feet would account for the difference of altitude between us and the highest point of the mountain, some 300 metres distant. Its companion peak was fifty feet lower, while the fourth point a little to the south was about level with us. It seemed to me that Qarnait overtopped all the heights within view, but in this I was wrong as I was to discover next day on the summit of Daka to the north-west.

We sat down upon the broad flattened summit of the western peak to take in the scene around us, while we shared out between us half a round of coarse wheaten bread, which I had stuffed into my pocket at breakfast, and the *Yamani* pipe of one of my companions. The air was delicious, and the temperature in the morning sun somewhere about seventy-five degrees *Fahrenheit*, while our vision extended over perhaps a hundred miles from the haze that covered the lowlands of the western

Qarnait—The Coronet

Tihama near the invisible sea to the broad flat stretch of the Rakba plain with its occasional hummocks. Southward, and perhaps thirty miles away or more, a long flat ridge formed the horizon, its western end plunging abruptly into the confused mass of foothills—with occasional mountainous excrescences like Lamlam and Waqr and the highlands of the Hudhail—below us, while to the north, again some thirty miles or so away, our vision was bounded by the saddle of Habala on the very edge of the escarpment, and points like Jabal Hindi and Jabal Dulaim in the Hada district. The prevailing tone was a ruddy brown of granite such as that on which we sat with patches of black, where horneblende or gabbro appeared as in the massif of Daka and hills like Farwa and in the southern and western ridges. And over all was, as it were, a veil of varied green where juniper, lavender and other vegetation covered the slopes and valleys, while in every fold of the rolling plateau at our feet nestled the scattered stone huts of some little hamlet and the terraced fields whose seasonal cultivation was the main occupation of their inmates. It was astonishing how thickly inhabited the region seemed as seen from above.

Afar off and slightly to the east lay Taïf with its conspicuous minaret of the Ibn 'Abbas mosque and the marble palace of Shubra in a patch of garden green. Ghumair stood out among the surrounding ridges and the hill of Qaim which, whether seen from near or far, looked remarkably like the profile of the Dom at Cologne. In the valley beyond the first ridge to our north-west lay the scattered villages of Al Fara', the chief settlement of the Shifa, while beyond it in the same direction behind another ridge rose the peak of Daka, black with a sheen of green along its flanks, with the lofty ridge of Barad to its right and further away. Southward, between us and the last ridge already mentioned, whose inhabitants they called Bani Yus and whose name they could not give me for it lay beyond their ken in the land of Yaman, lay a series of six or seven lower, but otherwise similar transverse ridges, each starting at no great height from the plateau-level and rising to a peak westward before plunging into the abyss of the *Tihama*, a name applied by the highlanders rather to the foothills which fringe

Qarnait—The Coronet

the steep escarpment of the Shifa than to the coastal plain proper, which is again beyond their active ken. Below us to the north the ravines of Sunna and Gharif united to run down into Wadi Harjal and onwards into the Liya valley, while to the south and west the depression of Ithraba circled the foot of Qarnait to disappear over the edge of the escarpment into the winding valley of Wadi Niyat, whose course between the ridges below we could follow into the far distance, where it coalesces with the broad white sandy line of Wadi Lamlam, which carries the main coastal pilgrim route to Mecca from the south.

The descent was easy enough though scrambling, while most of my companions quite unconcernedly loaded themselves with great dead logs for their evening fires and marched none the less jauntily for their burdens. Yet they regarded Qarnait as a hard climb—*bilmarra 'asir*, exceedingly difficult—and promised me an easy proposition at Daka on the morrow. It took us an hour—the same time as we took ascending—to reach our starting point, where we dallied only long enough to have some welcome tea and bread and whence, taking leave of our friendly hosts with the customary pecuniary tokens of reciprocated friendliness, we started off on our own feet, as the first part of the march was rough for the donkeys, towards the next locality on our programme. At first we ascended Wadi Gharif, in which were fig-trees and a huge vine entwined about a *Sidr*-tree of unusual height. A quarter of an hour brought us to the head of the valley and a low col, from which we descended steeply by a rocky road to the fields of Al Fura' in a basin overshadowed by and partly terraced up the sides of a great granite hummock called Muntahara. We mounted at the bottom, but had to relieve our donkeys of our weight again at the top of the next ridge, which formed part of a wide amphitheatre of juniper-clad slopes round the terraced fields at the head of Wadi Harjal. An army of ravens, wheeling about the valley, was enjoying its breakfast of juniper berries, and seemed to resent our passing intrusion.

A sleepy hamlet lay across our track as we crossed the cultivated area, making for a steep densely wooded ravine, some

Qarnait—The Coronet

way up which we found a shady pool of water emitting a gentle, short-lived trickle. A woman with a flock of sheep and goats was in occupation and withdrew to a discreet distance while we refreshed ourselves at the spring. She seemed to have an extensive monosyllabic dialect of weird noises for converse with the animals in her charge.

Near the top of the ravine we entered the first terraced fields of the Fara' district with a little hamlet perched on the top of a knoll about a hundred feet above them. We soon reached the crest of the plateau and followed a descending valley of broad bare terraced cornfields, which they had reaped in June or July of an inferior crop. The junipers were still with us and before reaching the chief village of the tract, Naq'a by name, we passed a cemetery of spacious graves, each hedged round with an oval frame of granite and quartz blocks with taller headstones. I noticed that Salih here, and indeed whenever we passed the resting places of the departed, muttered a prayer or greeting as he walked by. At Naq'a we tried to make enquiries for suitable lodging, but the population was at the moment gathered in the mosque for the Friday prayers, and we passed on as I thought it would be better to make our headquarters nearer the centre of the group of hamlets which lay scattered about the valley. Ten minutes later we drew rein at the hamlet of Halba and our host-to-be, who had been working in his vegetable patches, came rushing across the intervening space to bid us welcome—after discreet inquiries from which he elicited the information that we were respectable (and not impecunious) visitors from the Jauf as they call the comparatively low-lying valley of Taïf. We must have been just over 7,000 feet above sea-level.

We were kept waiting at the door for a few minutes while the guest-chamber was cleaned up and spread with mats and locally-made *Shamlas* (carpets) for our reception. It proved to be a sort of shed, roofed with timber and wattles, with a coffee-hearth in the centre and another near the door. I selected a post near the door for myself for air and freshness, while my companions huddled by preference round the fire in the inner gloom of the shed. Our host, Hamud, then went forth to busy

himself about our entertainment; and his father, Humaiyid, came in to give us welcome, winking at me knowingly and pointing silently at his chest as if to say that therein resided an abundance of goodwill and the ability to turn it to the practical advantage of the deserving. When his son appeared he automatically played second fiddle, but cupidity was writ large on every line of his countenance.

Our shed was one of a series of similar single-storeyed buildings grouped round what might be called a farmyard. Our asses were installed with millet stalks to browse on in an open enclosure adjoining us, while sheep and fowls seemed to have freedom of the domain, one hut of which was reserved for the women while another—a well-built masonry house—seemed to be untenanted, but securely locked and bolted—perhaps a granary. Behind us, up the slope of the low hill on which the hamlet was situated, were other groups of huts and sheds, while on the highest point stood a typical Husn. Such was the hamlet of Halba and such, so far as I could see from near or far, were all the other hamlets of the settlement. Not all of them, however, had towers—there seemed to be five of them in all—while Naq'a was distinguished among its fellows by being the residence of the local *Amir* or headman and the parish priest who was also the schoolmaster, while one of its sheds served as the *Jami'* or congregational mosque of the whole settlement.

Subhi, the *Amir*, and the population of all the hamlets of Al Fara', except Malha, whose people are of the Hajja section, belong to the Sa'd section of Bani Sufyan. They have undoubtedly the most fertile and largest cultivable tract of these parts, and their banked and terraced fields extend on a wide front for perhaps five or six kilometres from the edge of the escarpment to the point where the valley narrows into a ravine on its downward course to Liya. Apart from wheat and barley, the staple crop of the district is the Prickly Pear, whose delicious and wholesome fruit is sent to Taïf and Mecca in wooden boxes, 24 × 6 × 6 inches in size, to sell at two or three *Riyals* (six or seven at Mecca), according to the demand, per camel load of sixteen to twenty boxes. It is a cheap fruit compared with the grapes and pomegranates of Taïf and Liya, but it costs

nothing to grow beyond the trouble of sticking a fid of the grim-looking cactus into the earth. Among other things, tomatoes (*Quta*) and pumpkins seemed to be prominent, while there was a good deal of lucerne and even, at this late season, some fields of uncut barley. Among fruit trees I noticed figs, apples, apricots and tree-climbing vines. Irrigation is from wells, twenty feet deep, sunk through some ten feet or so of alluvial soil, well lined with masonry, and as far again into the underlying granite. Cattle, generally in pairs, do the well-traction. In all respects it seemed a prosperous little colony though there was a good deal of grumbling about the recent drought.

A meal of bread and honey was served to us soon after our arrival and I then showed signs of wanting to go out for a look round, whereupon Humaiyid came to implore me not to risk tiring myself. I gathered he had reasons for not wishing me to wander about the district but, after some little time spent in futile argument, he yielded at my suggestion that I would resume my journey. That would not have suited his designs on my purse, and he not only yielded but decided to accompany me himself. Perhaps he thought that he would be hauled over the coals by the *Amir* for acting guide to one who had not called on—and was at the time indeed ignorant of the existence of—the head of the district. He was evidently perturbed as we set out for the afternoon's excursion, and I refrained from making use of my butterfly net in spite of occasional temptation. As we drew away from the haunts of men he gradually became more at ease, and on our return journey I was able to initiate him in the strange rites of entomology; though I shocked him once by picking a sprig of some plant said to be poisonous and a sure cause of blindness. "*Kubbuh! Kubbuh!*—drop it, drop it," he almost growled, but an hour of my company had obviously convinced him that there was no danger in my particular forms of madness and he was content, when we got near home, to leave me alone to wander at will until sunset. I accosted a small family group working at a neighbouring well and listened to the anxious apprehensions of the pater-familias lest an ugly-looking bulge in the masonry substructure

should result some day in the collapse of the pit. "Oh! that we could find some money," he exclaimed, "to put such things right."

Humaiyid had conducted me up the valley past the hamlets of Bilad Ahl Mansur and Qarn (the latter apparently in ruins and the former a single farmyard group with a *Husn*) to the very edge of the escarpment, where a narrow precipitous gorge plunges headlong down into the ravine of Sha'ib Hawiya 2,000 feet below, which winds its way between the steep slopes of its flanking ridges into the Tihama plain. The escarpment at its head forms a wide semicircle, grading steeply down to the valley and clothed with junipers growing out of the cracks and crannies of the mountain-side. The view was, of course, more restricted than that I had enjoyed in the morning from Qarnait, but in some respects it was grander for we stood not on a peak, but on the very edge of a precipice looking straight down into a yawning abyss.

When I got back home just before sunset a struggling sheep was produced for my acceptance and duly slain. The rumour of it must have spread through the district, for our hut soon filled with visitors, one of whom hailed me from the darkness round the coffee hearth as I sat at a distance, ignoring my host's guests and writing up my notes by the feeble light of a flickering wick. He was no less a person than Subhi, the *Amir*! I mumbled some apology for my ignorance of his identity and soon had him at my side sharing a pipe, imbibing tea and conversing. His main object was to inveigle me to his house, which we had passed in the morning, for a cup of coffee, but I parried his insistence by explaining that time was short and our projected visit to Daka essential to my happiness. So this time he missed the shekels which might have been his had he not been praying when I passed, but he enjoyed a good dinner of mutton and rice and slept with us. It was the first time for months that I had slept indoors and I had been wise to deposit myself as near the door as possible, as 'Abdul Latif and others sleeping in the inner recesses of the shed had their night disturbed by uninvited bedfellows. I slept soundly the while and made no attempt to ascertain the exact source of their troubles.

Qarnait—The Coronet

By 7 a.m. the next morning we were on the move, our route taking us first north-west to the Mansur hamlet and thence north-east up the Malha valley and past the hamlet of the same name to the foot of a semi-circular barrier formed by the ridge of Shu'ar on the left and that of Lubba on the right, the two joining in a low col from which we looked back over the intervening ridges to the broadside of Qarnait, for all the world like a Bactrian camel with its neck arched back. The terraced fields high up the slopes and the rich profusion of junipers suggested the feasibility of olive cultivation, and my companions informed me—though I saw none—that wild olives do exist in these parts. It should surely not be difficult to graft cuttings from the cultivated tree on to such wild stock, for the climate, soil and rainfall are all in favour of such an enterprise.

From the col we looked down through the juniper forest to the valley of Wadi Awass and across it to the green-black slopes and summit of Daka itself. High up on its flank to north of west Wadi Awass begins the steep course which carries it down past the hamlet and *Husn* of Baqala on its right bank to its confluence with the ravine of Kailan, and thence between the hamlets of Dahla and Al Laiq (Al Dhaiq) north-eastward. In due course it changes name to Wadi Safra and runs less steeply, receiving the flow of Wadi Uqailih midway, until it joins the valley system that feeds Wadi Liya.

We dismounted and descended steeply to Dahla and, beyond it, to the Hamuri hamlet of Al Laiq, whence, leaving our donkeys with Muhaisin and 'Abdul Latif and warning-in for lunch, we started on our climb, escorted and guided by an intelligent child of the Hamuri household, who proved an excellent mountaineer and an adept catcher of grasshoppers, for which in due course he received sixpence.

Daka is certainly a simple proposition in comparison with Qarnait, but we did not reach its summit without adventure. When we had got within 400 feet of the top we paused for a short rest and, looking back, observed three men coming up the hill at a swinging pace and apparently in hot pursuit. Salih and Humaiyid, who had accompanied us from Fara' to earn an extra *Riyal*, seemed a little vexed and perturbed, and I soon

gathered that our pursuers were *Hudhailis* from Baqala, the western slope of Daka being in their tribal range while that on the east is Hajja territory like Wadi Awass from Al Laiq downwards. They were soon up with us, and no time was lost in coming to explanations. "Have you news for us," asked Salih, "or is it our news you want?" "Well, let us have yours," said the leader of the Hudhail party, a lithe young man clad in a waist-cloth and a heavy sheep-skin mantle over his naked sholders. He duly learned that I was a visitor from Taïf, come to take the air among the highlands and now, as they saw, contemplating doing so from the summit of Daka. They expressed pain and surprise at our omission to claim the hospitality of Baqala, and did not seem satisfied with the obvious explanation that that would have involved a long detour from the straight line. In a word, they objected to our proceeding any further and, as an alternative, suggested that I should go up under their guidance while my erstwhile companions returned home. To that I objected strongly, while suggesting that we should all go up together, in which case they would not be forgotten for purposes of bounty, and adding casually that it was a matter of supreme unconcern to me whether we proceeded to the summit or returned whence we came. Salih and Humaiyid each in turn took 'Ubaidallah, the rival chieftain, aside to explain matters further, doubtless with special reference to the profits likely to accrue from a reasonable attitude. Yet no attempt was made by the opposition to strike a bargain—that would have been against the laws of hospitality as understood in these parts—and their truculence gradually faded away in favour of a joint visit to the summit. So all was well, and off we started again, though 'Ubaidallah, who led the way, stopped now and again to scrutinize me keenly with his soft fawn eyes as if to wonder—! On each occasion, though somewhat out of breath with the climbing, I stared him out of countenance, and on he went, still wondering, until at length we stood upon the top of Daka and I found by reference to the aneroid in my pocket that we were at a higher altitude than the summit of Qarnait. In all probability, therefore—for it would be rash to speak of certainty in such a case—Daka is

Qarnait—The Coronet

the highest point of the Hijaz, 8,350 feet above sea-level by reference to previous and subsequent aneroid readings at Jidda.

Apart from some hamlet settlements at the foot of the mountain in the valleys descending from its flanks, the extensive view commanded from the summit of Daka was very much the same as that we had enjoyed from Qarnait. The actual town of Taïf was hidden by a ridge, but Shubra stood out conspicuously, while the horizon in all directions remained the same. The peculiar greenish sheen which Daka has, when seen from a distance, is mainly due to a shrub called *Sha'th* which grows profusely on the stony slopes, while there are also junipers all the way up the mountain, whose main bulk is a black rock, perhaps basalt or hornblende, with dykes of quartz. On the summit is a roofless stone shelter (for shepherds), with a niche pointing to Mecca and indicating its use for prayers. Neither from here nor from Qarnait could we see anything at all of the familiar landmarks of Mecca which lay in the direction of and behind the massif of Habala. By that way also lies the road by which the folk of these valleys proceed with their fruit and their scantlings to the city, and, so far as I could gather, there is no practical route down the gorges leading to the foothills and Tihamā. As the winter comes on, however, most of the highlanders go down to those valleys with their flocks until the spring, when the crops sown in November are well-grown.

At Al Laiq, at the foot of the mountain and some 1,100 feet below the summit, we found the Hamuri family and their friends gathered to welcome us, the honours being done by Hasan, the head of the house and grandfather of our small guide. He was advanced in years, but sprightly and genial. We here found a small variation on the ordinary housing arrangements of the Shifa, the guest-chamber being a masonry hut about twelve feet square with wattle roof and with one side opening by its whole width northward on to a spacious rectangular terrace built out up to the edge of the *Wadi* below. We found similar arrangements at other places down the valley, but I did not ascertain whether the terrace was for social purposes or a threshing-floor—possibly a combination of both,

and a pleasing feature. There were a few other houses close by and a typical *Husn* at about 300 yards' distance downstream. The whole of the stream-bed and the slopes on either side to a height of 200 to 300 feet were occupied respectively by dyked basins and terraced fields.

Our lunch was of the bread and honey order, but they produced a sheep in the hope that we might dally to eat it. Our plans for an immediate forward move, however, saved its life and at 1 p.m. we started off across the stream-bed to follow a track leading north of east on the slope of its right bank. About four or five kilometres on we came to another settlement of Al Laiq complete with *Husn*, huts and cemetery, where we left the valley to cross a low ridge into another running parallel to it and called Al Musaimir. In this also was a small hamlet of the Hajja folk, beyond which we came back to the main valley, now running north-east in a rocky, pebbly bed some fifty yards wide and without any trace of cultivation. Its name was now Wadi Safra, and it ran like a broad glade between the dense juniper forests on both sides. We followed it for two kilometres down to the confluence of Wadi Uqailih, a lovely highland valley rising steeply amid tumbled boulders and patches of juniper. Here and there, probably in former times, dams had been thrown across the stream, but there was now no sign of cultivation in the lower reaches though there were occasional pools of water on the surface. In a boulder scooped out into a shelter by wind and water I noticed rough paint-daubs of rectangular design with lines and dots, but my companions could not explain their significance.

Higher up, we left the valley to climb with the track to a rough col commanding an attractive view of the Uqailih settlement with two *Husns* and several hamlets on either side of the valley which was here fully terraced and dyked. The junipers here grow tall and straight, presumably the result of regular pruning, and the fields were covered with a light sandy silt. We passed, as we descended into the settlement, several groups of people working at their crops, while two small girls, clad in red smocks with flounces of blue and white stripes round the bottom, tended a flock of kids under the shade of some well-

Qarnait—The Coronet

grown trees. Among them were some young lambs looking strange with a covering of some resinous distemper to protect them from ticks.

At the head of the valley and at about 200 feet up its left bank we came to a group of huts belonging to the local *Amir*, — one Dakhilallah of the Hajja. There were none but women about and I was anxious to hurry on, but Salih—Humaiyid had left us at Al Laiq to return home—spotted the *Amir* about a mile away in the fields below and hailed him, so that he came puffing and panting—for he was not young—up the hill to cut us off. He had arrived only that day from Ta'if, where he had been on official business, and he pressed us to stay the night, but we pleaded haste to arrive back at Ta'if and he let us go. In ten minutes we reached the summit of the ridge which forms the watershed between the Wijh and Liya drainage systems. Wadi Uqailih belonging to the latter while Sha'ib Ghardhan, now confronting us, was a tributary of Wadi Shaqra which flows down to Wuhait and so into the Wijh, which waters Ta'if.

In the distance we saw Ghumair, while the great hog-back of Barad lay close at hand to the north-west. A long but easy descent brought us to the edge of a sheer cliff of red granite, down which we found our way on foot by a tortuous track to the bed of Sha'ib Ghardhan, in which was a profusion of *Salam* (acacia) trees in place of the junipers of the higher levels, for we were now less than 6,000 feet above sea-level and about 1,000 feet below the main plateau of Shifa. In a quarter hour we came to the most northerly of the three *Husns* of Shaqra and, as the sun was not far from its setting, we decided to spend the night where we were, though the *Husn* and its surrounding huts were untenanted and we had no provisions for dinner.

Salih, having failed to persuade me to wander upstream in search of food, sallied forth himself to forage while 'Abdul Latif and Muhaisin made tea. Having no light, I had decided to turn in when Salih returned with a man, whom he had found wandering in search of a lost camel and who happened, by a curious coincidence, to be the owner of these huts. His cupboard, however, was entirely bare and the prospects of food were not encouraging, though we could see a kitchen or camp

Qarnait—The Coronet

fire some little way off. Suddenly, and without any warning, our host appeared carrying a large dish and inviting us to dine! In the darkness I distinguished a number of round cakes and thankfully put forth my hand to the welcome bread. To my astonishment it was sticky and I soon discovered that our fare was not bread but combs of pure honey taken, as I learned, from hives scarcely twenty yards away. And excellent honey it was. Later on some hot round cakes of wheaten bread were produced to complete our meal, and it was a satisfied party that settled down for a night's rest under the shadow of the tall *Husn*. One of the black-rock door-jambs seemed to have the traces of an inscription practically effaced by wind, weather and time, while the larger irregular block which served as lintel over the entrance had curious though modern markings diversified by the patter of bullets, the sole record of some forgotten fray.

It was curious that I had spent these few days in a district famous for and, as it were, flowing with honey without seeing any signs of its makers or the methods of hive-keeping practised by the inhabitants. I had, indeed, made inquiries only to be told that there were no hives in the particular spot at which I had made them; and doubtless I had passed close to where hives were to be seen for the asking without my companions realizing that I might like to see them. The only general facts I had gathered in conversation were, firstly, that the bees for the most part affect lower levels than the actual Shifa, where the winters are too severe for them, and, secondly, that much of the honey comes from the Tiham gorges. Now, however, I was to remedy this defect in my experience within a few hours of the end of my tour and, as soon as the sun was up, I paid a visit to the hives (*'Idan*, plural of *'Ud*) my host had robbed in the evening. They were located in a stone-built shed very much like the other buildings of the farmyard and with one side open to the southward. Each hive consists of a barrel, about three or four feet long and some eight inches in diameter, made by hollowing out the trunk of a well-grown *Salam* tree. The fore and aft ends of the barrel are stoppered with removable circular wooden discs fitting tightly, while the bottom part of

Qarnait—The Coronet

the front (outward-facing) disc is slightly chipped away to allow of the ingress and egress of the bees, which seem to be smaller and thinner than those of England, for instance. The barrels are arranged in superimposed tiers (two, three or four as the case may be) along the front of the shed, while above the tiers and in the interstices between the hives is a covering or stuffing of rubble, brushwood, grass and stones to keep the temperature at a reasonable level. Behind the tiers of hives is a passage for the use of the honey-robbers, who detach the rear disc and remove the combs by cutting round them with a knife. In the Shaqra apiary (*Hali*) there must have been some fifty hives at least, though not all of them were occupied by bees as the past season of drought had played havoc with them. The combs are circular, of the same diameter as the hives and about an inch thick, a little wax being placed by hand in each hive to serve as a nucleus. The bees themselves are collected in the traditional way by experts, who find the queen (here called *Ab* or father) and place it in a small wooden trap round which the swarm forms to be captured in a cloth and thus brought home. In seasons of drought the bees are provided with a lump of dates to feed on, and a good deal of the honey produced is left to them—otherwise they find sustenance and surplus sweets in the flowers of the valleys.

Our march next morning (the minimum temperature of the night had been fifty degrees *Fahrenheit*) was down the charming winding valley of Wadi Shaqra, which meanders past the prominent hill of Farwa to its confluence with Wadi Tawila, which is probably merely the lowest reach of Wadi 'Amt. Here an encampment of Quraish, fellow-tribesmen of Muhaisin, with mean tents and considerable flocks marked our passing out of the range of the Hajja folk. And in a few moments a bend of the valley revealed the prodigious twin Eucalyptuses of Wuhait in the once splendid garden formed here by Sharif 'Aun about thirty-five years before and still watered by a brook issuing from a subterranean spring nearby. Besides its great specimens of Eucalyptus the garden boasts all manner of exotic marvels, including sweet limes, spruce, firs and other kinds of trees as well as local products such as cactus and pomegranate.

Qarnait—The Coronet

The Makhala valley, which runs along the foot of Barad, joins the Shaqra valley here at right angles from the west, and just above the junction of the two are the unfinished barracks, begun by Sharif 'Aun to house his escort, but abandoned at his death in 1905 to perish by slow degrees like his botanical garden.

Wuhait can be reached easily by car from Taïf, from which it is some thirteen kilometres distant, the road descending the valley, which is of heavy sand in parts, along the right bank until the next settlement of Wahat is reached at its confluence with Wadi Wijh, under which runs the subterranean spring-aqueduct which ultimately exhausts itself in the gardens of Shubra. Wahat is a small hamlet with a few good houses for the accommodation of week-end visitors from Taïf and summer immigrants from Mecca. It has also an extensive area of basin irrigation producing good crops of millet, and some excellent gardens with vine-trellises, pomegranates, figs and other fruit-trees with lucerne as a subsidiary crop.

The donkeys, making about six kilometres an hour, soon covered the short distance across an alluvial plain on the right of the sandy *wadi*-bed to Mathnat, the first suburb of Taïf, and it was not long before we entered the town itself by the *Bab al Sail*. My little holiday had come to an end all too quickly, and I was soon drawn into the gossip-current of local events by my host, while my mind still wandered pleasantly among the peaks and uplands of the Hijaz. Afar off, Qarnait and Daka pointed to the sky, but they were no longer the mysterious strangers they had been to me so long. And I was certainly the first European to stand upon their crests. Muhaisin was duly paid off for his asses and his company, and two days later I drove down to the still lingering summer of Mecca and Jidda.

A PERSIAN HOLIDAY

IN this essay I propose to conduct my readers on a tour of Persia with rambling comments on the affairs of that unfortunate country on the very eve of its sudden awakening to a brighter day than it had known for many a long century. That awakening was to sweep British influence out of the land for good—if we can reasonably regard the developments of the two decades that have since elapsed as an augury for the unknown future.¹ And with the eclipse of British “assistance” to a poor, weak country, it may be added, disappeared the equally welcome solicitude of Britain’s rival—the bear which had formerly conspired with the lion to share the prey but had suddenly, under the influence of a remarkable transformation, turned nasty towards its uncomfortable ally and, to some extent, repentant of its earlier treatment of their common victim. Persia has lost nothing by the departure of her friends, but she had to show them to the door. They were, indeed, loth to leave her, all unprotected against the perils of an inscrutable future.

To some extent she owes a debt of gratitude to the Mesopotamian rebels, who first opened the eyes of Great Britain to the enormity of her military commitments in a vast country which was independent only in name. I do not propose to discuss here Sir Percy Cox’s Anglo-Persian treaty of 1919 and his dictum that Persia should be left to “stew in its own juice” if it didn’t like the agreement and showed its dislike by refusal to ratify it. Cox, no doubt, contemplated the perpetuation of extensive British influence and interference in Persia. But it is rather to Sir Arnold Wilson, at the peak of his Mesopotamian proconsulship, that we should go for a glimpse into the future that was in pickle for that country as a member of the great Middle Eastern galaxy which was to be a girdle about the loins of the British Empire. Baghdad was to be the centre of the new constellation, a vast military camp bristling with armoured cars

¹ As readers will know, the events of 1941 have once more put the clock back in Persia.

A Persian Holiday

and aeroplanes to project political stars under suitable military escort into the furthestmost parts of the newly discovered firmament. It was undoubtedly a splendid dream, but only a dream after all, of the sort one wakes from only to find that one is still but a mortal in a very ordinary world and to wonder what one has had for dinner to create such chimeras.

In considering the problems arising out of demobilization—a matter which he had to face, however little he may have liked the idea, in deference to the war weariness of Great Britain—he assumed that, whatever arrangements were ultimately decided upon for Mesopotamia, effective British control would be an essential feature of them. This involved the maintenance for a long time of an efficient military force to combat disturbances anywhere in the Middle East. Such might occur as near as Mosul or as far away as Armenia and the Caucasus, but Britain would be there, wherever it was. European peace was in the balance, and any tilting of that balance by naughtiness in Persia, for instance, would again plunge Europe into the abyss of Avernus. But with a strong force at Baghdad, which was also to be the nerve-centre of a vast network of railways, we could not only help the new State to be created in the Middle East to stability, but could strike to-day at Aleppo or to-morrow at Trans-Caucasia. The Baghdad force would enable Great Britain to act as the accredited deputy of all the civilized nations of the world in the pacification and stabilization of the savage belt between Constantinople and India. Reforms under European auspices and supervision could not be expected in Persia or Turkey or Armenia without the support of military force. And all the nations of the Middle East, provided that her striking power was effective, would surely recognize in Great Britain not only the necessary qualifications for the sole trusteeship of civilization in the management of their affairs, but also an altruism and a broad-minded tolerance which might be sought elsewhere in vain. It is a long cry from the Mesopotamia of 1919–20 to the Munich of 1938, which has prompted a greater seer than Wilson—Mr Lloyd George—to declare that not two nations could be found ready to follow the lead of this England.

A Persian Holiday

Such at any rate was the ambitious frame in which Wilson set his mind to consider the specific needs of the various lands that were to come within his orbit. Of Persia he could speak with wide personal experience and intimate knowledge. From end to end of its vast expanse that country was at that time bristling with British troops and local levies organized by British officers. The southern province of Arabistan was under complete and effective British administrative control. From Mashhad in the north and Bushire in the south radiated the rays of British benevolence over a disorganized and down-trodden people. The capital Teheran, had been linked with Baghdad—in anticipation of the glorious future—by a first-class motor road protected at intervals by British troops in the interest of the communications of a British army, whose presence in the heart of the country was a solid guarantee of Persian independence. And a large number of British ladies had shown their appreciation of the salubrious climate of a lovely country by coming all the way out from England to join their husbands or brothers at Karind. Surely Persia could be nothing but grateful for this harbinger of the future tourist traffic which would fill the pockets of its guides and touts.

But all this rough and ready organization—after all it had been hastily devised under war conditions—of Persian happiness would have to be put on a better and more permanent basis. Measures to that end had already been proposed and Wilson was now ready to push them on to the stage of execution. It was a matter of common knowledge that the peace and prosperity of the central districts—Shiraz and Isfahan and others—depended but precariously on the gendarmerie forces which, despite their organization and control by British officers, were not really very effective for the purpose in view. The country round them was rough and mountainous, and its tribes did not seem altogether appreciative of the advantages which the said British officers were so anxious to confer on them. It would not, however, be very difficult or expensive—in the long run, of course, it would be cheaper—to remedy these admitted shortcomings. And what a splendid gesture it would be to confront an astonished Persian Government with a surprise packet

A Persian Holiday

of aeroplanes with pilots and ground staff complete with all the materials necessary for the various aerodromes and landing-grounds. In the winter they could be concentrated at Bushire (an important station on the imperial air route of to-morrow), while in the summer they could be transferred to the charms of Shiraz. Of course the Persian Government would make a show of demurring at so generous a gift at the expense of the British exchequer, but we could make it quite clear that we expected nothing in return. On the contrary, they could disband their useless and expensive gendarmerie forthwith, and they could disband their army, too, if they liked—perhaps keeping a regiment or two for ceremonial purposes. We would do all their military and police work for them without charge. And the unruly tribes would soon come to heel after experiencing a bomb or two.

I have never been able to understand why the smaller nations of the world don't respond more kindly to the obvious readiness of the larger, richer, stronger and better-equipped States to do all their work for them. Their reluctance is probably attributable to nothing more than the traditional human passion for playing at soldiers. Possibly they are also inspired by a genuine desire not to impose too much on the altruistic kindness of the Great Powers. In this particular case, however, Wilson's generous gesture did not altogether meet with the approval of the Government of India. Firstly—and quite naturally as charity begins at home—they resented the jeopardization of the lives of British pilots in such a venture. Any forced landing in that inhospitable mountainous country would mean the writing off of both pilot and machine. To obviate such losses it would be necessary to supply only first-class machines and that would be very expensive. Secondly, they thought—and in this it must be admitted that Lord Chelmsford's Government showed themselves at least a quarter of a century ahead of public opinion—that there were certain moral arguments against the use of air forces as a normal instrument of police work. How could one possibly discriminate between innocent and guilty from the air? To which Wilson replied from experience gained in Mesopotamia and north-

A Persian Holiday

west Persia that airmen had no more difficulty than foot-sloggers in discriminating between guilty and innocent—he obviously meant that in practice neither could do or did so, though he left it to be implied that aviators had developed a special sense that occasioned no difficulty in the process of such discrimination. He did not, however, venture to explain their secret and, if they ever had one, it can only be said on the basis of more recent experience in Hadhramaut and Palestine that it has not been handed down to the aviators of our own time. In the course of the argument it transpired, however, that, if the authorities were willing for such an experiment, the necessary foundation for the aerial control of Persia was already in being on a scale altogether surprising. With Baghdad as its parent, a flight of aeroplanes was stationed at Qazwin with a range of effective action covering Senna, 'Urmiya, Tabriz and Baku—in fact, the whole of north-west Persia. These machines were generally at the beck and call of the numerous Political Officers scattered about the area for administrative or punitive purposes. Similarly, a flight at Mosul controlled the part of Kurdistan adjacent to western Persia. Landing-grounds had been laid out on a generous scale throughout the “occupied territories” including Baku, Teheran and Arabistan and many other Persian localities. Every station at which there was a Political Officer had a landing-ground fully stocked with petrol, oil and other necessities. It was, indeed, a remarkable organization, capable of extension *ad lib*. And it is rather surprising that Wilson's new move did not meet with a warmer response. That must be put down to war-weariness in general, and perhaps in part to the rising tide of the Euphrates in rebellion.

The cry was then for contraction rather than expansion. The ladies at Karind fled to Baghdad and the horns of the British army in Persia were rapidly drawn in. By the time that I went up on my holiday visit in July, 1921, there was not a British soldier on the road between Qasr-i-Shirin on the frontier and Teheran. Karind was already a sorry wreck of dismantled bungalows from which the local *Badawin* had removed all removable woodwork to feed the camp-fires in their chilly mountains. The Persian Government was already collecting exorbitant

A Persian Holiday

toll-fees at every barrier—roughly speaking every municipal area—along the road which was falling to pieces already from studied neglect. There were so many other and more useful directions in which the fees could be dissipated. The great motor-road was already a pathetic reminder of those who had made it, and here and there I saw tears—positive tears—in the eyes of many who complained that there were now no customers to buy their fruit and their wares at prices considerably in excess of their market value. Let it not be supposed that the Persians rejoiced in the evacuation of their country. On the contrary! And it was only the relatively small section of what we used to call *intelligentsia* that voiced its satisfaction at the removal of an incubus. Such folk after all count for little in the scale of British values. *Gharib-parwari*¹ is the motto of imperialism.

My pen has carried me along faster than I intended to go, and I must return to Baghdad and the preparations for my journey. While more important affairs were proceeding in the Sarai which I had vacated, I contented myself with a round of farewell visits to those of my friends who, I judged, would not be embarrassed by my attentions. From some of them, and chiefly from old 'Abdul Qadir Pasha al Khudhairi, I collected letters of introduction to their friends in the various towns I would pass through. The Sevians² had withdrawn to Persia away from the rebellion and I would in due course see them at Sultanabad—the younger girl had married a British officer and was, I believe, in London. I hired a car to take me to Kirman-shah. From there onwards each stage would be catered for piecemeal. Early in July, 1921, everything was ready and, bidding farewell to my wife and daughter, I set out into exile.

It was good to feel free, though the feeling was tempered by the reflection that the structure which I had helped to design and build up had collapsed as the result of sabotage by its principal architects. I could shake the dust of 'Iraq from my feet with a clear conscience. And it was not long before I arrived at Qasr-i-Shirin and the Persian frontier, where a long line of pack-animals, human beings and some carts awaited the

¹ Protection of the poor.

² An Armenian family of Baghdad.

A Persian Holiday

completion of the tedious formalities which would, in due course, permit them to proceed in the desired direction. A motor-car was treated with just a little more respect than other forms of transport, and we got through the frontier customs and passport post with the loss of not much more than an hour. Almost immediately we began the long and tedious climb up the metalled road which British military engineers had built into the precipitous flank of the great valley debouching at Qasr-i-Shirin from the mountainous ramparts of Persia on to the plains of 'Iraq. Up and up we went as the sun went down, and my first night was spent in a little village in the neighbourhood of Karind. Next day we arrived at Kirmanshah, the first considerable town on the highway, where I was to spend a week or ten days in pleasant dalliance.

Before leaving Baghdad I had decided in principle to trust myself, at any rate in places where no hotels were available, to the hospitality of the Persian friends of my friends in 'Iraq. British hospitality, be it said in passing, keeps open house on a generous scale in these parts as in other countries of the East. I merely did not want to impose on it for I knew its burdens. I wanted also to be entirely independent and to see something of Persian life during my holiday. I trust, therefore, that the various Britannic consuls and the representatives of the Imperial Persian Bank, on whom falls the main burden of entertaining the passing official or traveller of European origin, did not take amiss my failure to claim their indulgence at the various places on my way. I saw much of them, of course, and learned much from them of local politics and conditions. On the whole their attitude was critical of the British abandonment of Persia to its own devices, though they probably breathed more freely in the less military atmosphere of this period. They were not optimistic about the future of the country, but then they scarcely knew, or only saw darkly as in a glass, what was already beginning to happen in far-off Teheran—the little cloud no bigger than a man's hand which was yet to drench Persia with the rain of independence—and of prosperity. It was, indeed, an opportune moment for a visit to the country. Apart from a little corner of it in Arabistan

A Persian Holiday

under British politico-military administration I had seen nothing of Persia and, after this visit, I was not destined to see it again. I saw it, therefore, in a period of transition from a past unknown to me to a future, which none of those who had known it of old would have dared to predict at that time. In what I saw there was little enough to suggest optimism but, after all, one doesn't see much on a holiday jaunt.

My hosts during my sojourn at Kirmanshah were two brothers, Muhammad Isma'il and Muhammad Taqi of the Nazim family. Their kindness and hospitality knew no bounds, and I had good reason to be grateful to them for taking in a complete stranger on the recommendation of distant friends and treating him as one of themselves in the ordinary routine of their simple, daily life. They were merchants in a fairly substantial way. With one or other of them in attendance, or alone, I wandered about the town and its surroundings to my heart's content; and in the evenings I would sit with them sipping tea and eating excellent cucumbers as we discussed the affairs of their world and mine. On several occasions I visited the local governor, Siqat-ul-Mulk, who was much interested to hear the latest news of developments in 'Iraq, of which only vague and uncertain accounts percolated at intervals into the Persian highlands. Among others that I saw were two brothers of a Jewish (Shashoua) family—merchants like my hosts and prosperous enough though perhaps more perturbed than the Muslim elements at the disappearance of the British army which had brought much grist to their mill and promised them a brighter future than they could now look forward to with any confidence.

My time thus passed pleasantly enough and it was 23rd July when I decided to embark on the next stage of my journey, feeling that I had learned a good deal about Kirmanshah without any temptation to write a book about it. The same Armenian chauffeur and the same car that had brought me here were available to take me hence. It was not long before the final farewells were said to my hosts and I mounted with my simple baggage. All went well until we got to Sar-i-pul, the toll-gate on the Qara Su river, where they demanded payment of the

A Persian Holiday

prescribed fees. The demand was in accordance with the law, but such things are not taken for granted in Persia and it was at least a free opportunity for a language lesson. I demurred to the demand and pointed out that, as the road had been built by British labour and money, it was ungracious of the Persian Government to insist on payment of toll-charges by a British official travelling for pleasure. It would be a graceful act, I argued, if all British travellers for all time were excused from such payments in recognition of the gift to which they had contributed as British taxpayers, to which the toll-keeper seemed to reply that the laws of the Medes and Persians were too ancient to take account of such modern considerations. So I paid him the sum of 103 Krans,¹ twenty-five of which covered myself and my servant, Isma'il by name, while the balance of seventy-eight was for the car and its contents including the chauffeur. I was then handed a receipt for the amount, but the only intelligible item on the paper was the figure 103—the rest was in Russian!

I assumed, however, that it was in fact a receipt for a sum justifying us in passing through the gate. But before this could happen the Persian Government appeared in another guise—a policeman—to challenge our right of way. He was a wizened, elderly gentleman, brusque of manner and abrupt of speech, and seemed exceedingly determined to do his duty whatever might befall. No one, he said, was allowed to pass that particular spot without a police permit, and therefore I must not do so. I must go back to Kirmanshah and get a permit or remain where I was—whichever I preferred. We tried persuasion on him in vain; we invoked the dignity of Great Britain in vain; and on the strength of my visits to Siqat-ul-Mulk I confided to him that I was a great friend of the governor. The man remained adamant, and I tried my Persian with a little abuse of the Persian Government and its methods of annoyance. That produced no effect on him, but the gatekeeper wavered. His instructions were to raise the toll-bar on payment of the prescribed fees. He would do that, and he did. We drove through to find the arm of the law barring our way on the

¹ 1 Kran equals 4d.

A Persian Holiday

other side. We argued again, more and more loudly, but all to no purpose. Very well, I said, I will go back but you must refund the toll-fees as you are refusing to let me pass. But the gatekeeper had explicit instructions never to part with any money received by him in the course of duty. He had raised the bar and, so far as he was concerned, I could pass through. The activities of the police were no business of his. That was the last straw. I descended to vulgar abuse and violent threats that I would report the matter to my friend the governor and so bring down his wrath on both their heads. With that I told the chauffeur to turn back. With a grating of the gears and a groaning of the engine we backed to turn. The constable, proud of his victory, advanced towards us and I was about to pour more curses on his head, when he said: "It's all right, you may proceed now." As we passed I smiled sweetly at another policeman who had been watching the proceedings, probably wondering when he would be called upon to arrest me, and he winked at me. It was a little difficult to understand the incident, but the chauffeur suggested that, possibly the policeman had been instructed to obstruct the passage of some criminal expected to pass that way and had nearly been guilty of a mistake in identification.

The worst of such mistakes is that they take up a great deal of time. Perhaps the man was merely aiming at a gratuity—though his method seemed unnecessarily devious. It struck me, however, that if a British official could be treated so harshly—for there was still in Kirmanshah a lingering respect for British prestige—it augured ill for the local inhabitants, Persians or Jews, especially the latter, for all Jews were assumed to be fabulously rich. On we now went with the rather dreary lines of the bleak, sun-scorched hills on either side of the road—on and on endlessly through or past villages and cultivated fields until we reached the settlements watered by the Gamasiab torrent, a tributary of the Qara Su. Beyond them we came to the village and large caravanserai of Bisitun, where there is also a small hotel for the accommodation of tourists visiting the famous tri-lingual inscriptions of Darius, the Great King. It was, indeed, an impressive monument, reached by a rough

A Persian Holiday

climb up the boulder-strewn hillside to the huge, smoothed face of rock on which it is carved. And there it has stood through the ages proclaiming the greatness of the King, though slowly but surely time and weather are obliterating what was intended to be an imperishable record. For centuries yet it will doubtless remain more or less legible, but fortunately, through the devoted labours of Rawlinson, its text will survive for all time in print more perishable than stone, but more easy to perpetuate by copying from generation to generation, unless the civilization which prides itself upon such labours is itself swept away into oblivion by some great catastrophe. The Gamasiab torrent seems to issue from the very bowels of the mountains which preserve this record of the past. Their precipitous flanks seem inaccessible, but Bisitun village has developed a race of guides who entertain visitors by amazing exhibitions of climbing up the apparently vertical rock-face. Their toes and hands have learnt to make use of almost imperceptible irregularities on its surface.

The road continues beyond the inscriptions in a valley bounded on either side by hills and mountains to Sahna, a flourishing settlement with extensive gardens and orchards. I had been told that there were more inscriptions in this neighbourhood, but inquiries from peasants failed to locate them and we only broke our journey for half an hour to wander about the orchards. An old man and two small boys, his sons, accompanied me in my wanderings, and I was able to buy some apples and plums from their trees as well as stoneless grapes of excellent quality. "Is it true," the old man asked me, "that the British troops are returning to Persia? They tell me that they are already at the frontier." I assured him that there was no truth in such rumours, at which he expressed genuine regret. "Good folk they were—the English," he said, "and they bought fruit from me in large quantities."

A great effort to reach Kangavar before sunset failed of its object, and it was in the gloaming that we reached the inevitable toll-chain and saw the massive masonry ruins of its ancient temple. The British Consul at Kirmanshah had assured me that I need have no compunction in claiming the famous hospitality of the local governor. Nevertheless, it was with

A Persian Holiday

some trepidation that I directed the chauffeur to turn in through the great garden gate of his splendid estate. It was like dropping in unannounced on the owner of Chatsworth or some other ducal seat in England. But there the resemblance ended. At the hall door my exceedingly disreputable hired car was immediately surrounded by attentive servitors who treated it with the consideration due to a Rolls-Royce bringing an honoured and long-expected guest from the station. And among the servants appeared Agha 'Abdullah Khan, the governor's younger brother, who welcomed me with great cordiality and immediately put me at my ease. Then without further ceremony, while the servants proceeded to unload the car, he conducted me through the garden to a pleasant, unroofed summer-house at the further end of a short but charming avenue of willows and poplars. There I found and was introduced to the governor himself, Agha Faraj-ullah Khan, and within a few moments of my daring to enter those formidable portals I found myself on terms of intimacy with these two scions of ancient Persian nobility, whom I had never seen before—yet seemed to have known from the beginning of time. The conditions of European life have inevitably necessitated a system of rationing for the virtue of hospitality, and the open door is no more to be found by the passing traveller than by the trade of nations. But the gentler climate of the East has dealt more kindly with an indigenous plant which has not had to compete with more “useful” crops for the attention of the husbandman. Here, indeed, it blossoms perennially with a tropical richness—and nowhere more richly than in Persia, where Nature is kinder than in Arabia with its bounteous water and rioting gardens. The wine of Europe may be better and served more adroitly with each course in smaller glasses eloquent of the value of their contents, but the East knows only the brimming bowl, and the guest rejoices with gratitude, which he can never forget, in hospitality that he can never repay.

Come, henchman, come and pour the living wine;
In Paradise itself you'll never know
Water so sparkling, roses so divine,
As where by Shiraz Ruknabad doth flow.

A Persian Holiday

The two brothers presented a remarkable contrast. The younger man was short and stoutly built with the air of a man whose life was devoted to manly sports—war and the chase. The governor himself, equally addicted to the same pursuits, was taller, slimmer and of milder appearance with a somewhat disfiguring ailment of the eyes which had troubled him for some years. My profuse apologies for thus intruding upon their privacy, uninvited and unannounced, were brushed aside with assurances that I could not have pleased them better than by providing a diversion in their life of solitude. Our party now having been joined by the chain-keeper, an educated young man from Hamadan, we settled down to discuss the affairs of the world over refreshments—tea, apricots and cucumbers—until dinner was announced, a simple but sumptuous repast of rice, meat, vegetables and fruit in the Persian manner.

At my request I was allowed to sleep in the summer-house, but, before we separated for the night, my hosts insisted on my spending the following day as their guest and promised to organize a shooting picnic in order that I might see something of the country. Next morning accordingly I was provided with a pair of *Chivas* (rope-soled shoes), a gun, a bandolier of cartridges and a pleasing grey country-bred stallion with a British cavalry saddle. Our party consisted of some twenty persons in all, including the governor's two children—a boy of five and his sister of six, who were mounted on donkeys with servants in attendance on foot to see that they did not fall off. The cavalcade, having threaded the narrow, crooked streets of the town, turned up the valley of a charming, babbling brook to the village of Lower Karaguzlu. We then spread over the hills in search of game, but found that the local postmaster and a friend, not knowing of the governor's intention to shoot these coverts, had preceded us and succeeded in warning off all the game within miles around. In the process they had secured one Chakor and one Sisi, to which we added three hares as our total bag for the day. These had all been shot by an uncle of the governor, who had ridden out to join us on hearing of the expedition. Having ourselves drawn completely blank on the hillsides, we decided to repair to Upper Karaguzlu, an attrac-

A Persian Holiday

tive settlement further up the same valley amid a profusion of poplars, willows and other trees and shrubs. The servants had preceded us thither with all the necessary paraphernalia for a feast, and there we settled down to spend the greater part of the day, reclining on carpets spread in a well-shaded clearing amid the poplars and willows on the banks of a rapid stream about twenty feet wide with a pebbly bed. It was as ideal a spot for a picnic as one could imagine. We amused ourselves with rifle-shooting at targets set up on the opposite bank, and some of the party had shots at the fish in the stream, without much success as their bag was limited to two or three tiny fishes which were handed over to the children for their amusement. The shock of the bullets stunned the fish momentarily, and they were collected by the servants as they floated on the surface. The children were rather naughty and quarrelsome, but were never chided by their elders, whose suggestions rather than commands they entirely ignored with complete impunity. On one occasion a quarrel arose over a thermos-flask which the girl secured from the mêlée at the cost of a smack on the face from her little brother, who immediately dissolved in a flood of tears—not of repentance for hitting a girl, but of rage at the loss of the bone of contention. He was immediately petted and soothed into tearlessness, and the girl was simultaneously wheedled into relinquishing the flask to him.

Meanwhile we consumed apricots, grapes and cucumbers to our heart's content with tea from the singing samovars until it was time for a delicious lunch of mutton, chicken and rice with various vegetables and tasty broths and iced *Dugh* (sour milk) to wash it all down. The ice, or rather snow, is stored in special pits during the winter in large enough quantities to last through the whole summer. After lunch 'Abdullah Khan and his uncle, Haji 'Ali Muhammad, produced catapults and proceeded to test their skill against apples set up on branches near by for bets of cartridges. The honours were fairly even, but on several occasions I was called upon to adjudicate on doubtful claims. Once, for instance, the uncle had hit his apple fair and square without dislodging it from its perch and the nephew had challenged his claim. I had no hesitation, however, in

A Persian Holiday

giving judgment for the uncle on a hit so palpable. My own experiments with the catapult met with nothing but failure. 'Ali Muhammad, who though the uncle of the others was a man of not more than forty-five, was evidently a notable sportsman. And one feat of his was particularly impressive. Having set up an apple at a distance, he had several shots at it with a rifle held upside down with the butt resting against his unprotected forehead. He apparently trusted entirely to the strength of his arms to absorb what must otherwise have been a terrific shock.

The exhibition of trick-shooting continued all the way home as we rode along goat-tracks on the rough hillsides. The competitors, riding at a good canter, shot indifferently from either shoulder at rocks on the way with results that were quite astonishing though they seldom actually hit the mark. Such, no doubt, was the manner of their warfare and their horses were admirably trained for the purpose. Most of them were of mixed Arab-Persian breed, but they had some pure Arabs also. I never saw any of them start at the sound of a shot, but it was very different with the two dogs we had with us. At each shot they were all over the place, barking loudly, and they are evidently not trained to keep at heel. It was just after sunset when we reached Kangavar and, being ahead, I reined in to let the governor lead the procession through the town. He insisted, however, on my going first and I had to yield to him in the contest of courtesy. Dinner and bed brought a memorable day to an end, and I look back to this experience of the daily family life of Persian noblemen as one of the outstanding features of a very delightful Persian holiday.

The Governorate of Kangavar was for all practical purposes, though not theoretically, hereditary in the family of my hosts, which had held it for 150 years, with only occasional interruptions amounting in all, they told me, to only six years. The office was regarded as subordinate to the Governorate of Kirmanshah only when that post was occupied by a royal prince. Otherwise, as at this time, it dealt direct with the Central Government at Teheran. My hosts came originally of an Afghan tribe, the Afshar, and the titular head of the family—

A Persian Holiday

at this time the father, Agha Amanullah Khan, of my hosts, who had, however, relinquished the cares of provincial administration to his eldest son and was now living the life of a country squire—enjoyed the unique hereditary designation of Sari Arslan, the Yellow Lion. A few months before my visit the old man had had a grievous shock in the suicide of his youngest son, whose corpse had, through the good offices of the British political and military authorities, been despatched to Najaf for interment in its sacred soil without the usual sanitary formalities, which prescribed a sufficient period of delay after death to ensure complete decomposition of the corpse before transportation to Mesopotamia.

The family, for all its manly enjoyment of the good things of this world, took deep pride in its unswerving traditional loyalty to Shia' tenets and practices. Like other great Shia' families it had long possessed an ancestral vault in the Najaf valley of Wadi Salam, and more recently a burial chamber within the actual precincts of the shrine of 'Ali had been acquired. The young suicide had been consigned to it and thus, to his parent's satisfaction, lay in the very holy of holies of the Shia' faith. In securing this much-prized privilege the old man had owed much to a pseudo-'Arab '*Alim*,¹ named Muhammad Sa'id, who had some influence with the authorities at Najaf and was at this time in residence at Kangavar in the capacity of tutor to the governor's children. He told me at some length of the valuable service he had rendered, in the capacity of spy, to Leachman and other officers of the Mesopotamian administration. On one occasion, he told me confidentially, he had received a gratuity of Rs 5 for his services—perhaps a hint, which I ignored, that all contributions would be thankfully received.

Before leaving Kangavar I paid a visit to the great Fire-temple (Atishkada) already mentioned. To reach it I had to pass through the bazaar, which is roofed over with branches of trees to keep the sun out, and in which a number of Jews vie with the local shopkeepers in a somewhat meagre retail-trade in the products of India and Manchester, imported through

¹ A sort of doctor of divinity.

A Persian Holiday

Baghdad and Kirmanshah. Three columns of the temple and part of its outer wall of massive stone slabs *in situ* had been incorporated in a large mud-brick building at the end of the bazaar. A considerable section of the remainder of the outer wall was still also to be seen, though greatly damaged by the depredations of later builders. In addition to these standing remains some fallen pillars and capitals were also to be seen, one of the latter being scoured out to serve, it seemed, as a mortar for pounding grain. In ancient days the temple must have been a monument of outstanding magnificence. Of its origin little is known, but local legend attributes it to the gratitude of a father. Whether he was Nimrud or Kaikhusrau, or another, matters little. Whoever he was, he had a daughter afflicted by an incurable habit of sleeping with her mouth wide open. Under the advice of physicians or sorcerers the hero travelled with his daughter for health's sake. In whatever place the girl might be restored to a habit of normal slumber he was to take up his permanent residence, regarding the cure as a clear indication of the divine will and commemorating the miracle by the erection of a temple. So in his travels he came to Kangavar and the girl lay down to sleep under the ever-watchful eye of her parent. And suddenly into her wide open mouth popped a fly of the flies of Kangavar and the miracle occurred. Her mouth closed with a snap on the intruder and she slept happily ever after, as the erection of the temple proves conclusively. Another and more reverent version represents the malady as an affection of the eyes which was cured by the salubrious climate of Kangavar. In either case the temple was built in gratitude for a miracle.

So ended a delightful visit. My hosts saw me off at their garden gate, exacting from me a promise to visit them again on my return—a promise which for some forgotten reason I failed to keep—and off we started on the road to Hamadan. The first part of our drive lay through the broad fertile valley of Kangavar, profusely dotted with villages to the foot of the Alwand mountain. After a brief halt for a cup of tea at Hasanaabad we came to Asadabad, where the road begins to wind steeply up the mountain-side. Every now and then the car

A Persian Holiday

stopped to take breath—the climb was as much as it could manage in its wheezy condition. But we did reach the summit of the pass (7,300 feet above sea-level) in due course and looked down from it on the great plain of ancient Ecbatana—the modern Hamadan. On our right hand Alwand stood out serene above the world, several thousand feet above us. Behind and below us lay Asadabad with its lofty mound—doubtless the grave of some ancient village. And so we continued our journey, running easily down the winding track that led to the city.

At Hamadan there is a considerable Jewish colony, and my host to whom I had introductions from Baghdad, was Da'ud 'Abudi Hesqail Haiyim of that race—a very charming and hospitable man who, with his servants and relations, contributed much to the enjoyment of my sojourn here. In all I remained at Hamadan for a fortnight or slightly more. My host as a merchant was mostly busy during the daytime with the affairs of his flourishing business, and I was free to wander about at will, sometimes alone and at others with some relation or servant of the household in attendance. In the evenings we would foregather in the charming courtyard of Da'ud's house with his Jewish or Muslim friends and chat about the affairs of the world over light refreshments—excellent grapes and small cucumbers with salt—and tea until dinner-time, soon after which the whole city seemed to settle down to slumber against the early rising of the morrow. But, perhaps, the most delightful part of these days was the early morning when we could gather in the courtyard for tea and a simple breakfast and discuss plans for the day or other matters of local interest. After that I would go forth on a round of calls in the town or for an expedition into the neighbourhood. The Jewish community, and especially my host, seemed to be on excellent terms with their Muslim neighbours; and I met all the principal Muslim merchants and officials. Perhaps the most interesting element was a small, and rather unobtrusive community of Bahaïs, devotees of a sort of eclectic and universal faith which had a big vogue in Persia during the second half of the nineteenth century, but has of late become less fashion-

A Persian Holiday

able and has been compelled by circumstances to operate mostly *sub rosa*. Yazd and Kirman, the scenes of its original budding, are still, I believe, the most important bases of this religion in Persia to-day, and at Qazwin I was to find quite a well-developed society of Bahaïs, thanks to introductions to its leaders from my Hamadan friends. I shall have more to say about the sect in connection with my visit to that place. Meanwhile it seemed that the Jews of Hamadan were on almost intimate terms with the local Bahaï branch of which, I think, some of them were actually members, though general Shia' and official coolness towards the sect militated against any advertising of its membership and activities. It was like a society of friends proceeding quietly and calmly about its business and social occupations in the firm conviction that one day God would ordain and give effect to the amalgamation of all the jarring sects and faiths that claim his exclusive approval.

Since the withdrawal of the British troops, who, of course, found Hamadan a convenient and important centre of communications for the main body at Qazwin, the European community had dwindled back to its original and insignificant proportions. There was, however, a small European society with the British consulate as its natural pivot and, of course, a branch of the Imperial Bank, as well as an American group concerned with the development and modernization of the famous rug and carpet industry. They are engaged in a laudable effort to prevent the carpet-making industry of the country from becoming completely demoralized and vulgarized by modern conditions. Their factories in various parts of Persia provide good opportunities of work and subsistence for hundreds of girls and women, who in those antediluvian days of less than twenty years ago plied their craft under strict *pardah* conditions. A visit to the factory was therefore a rare privilege and what I saw of the work and conditions convinced me that Mr Edwards and his assistants were carrying out a remarkable and important enterprise with all the zeal of missionaries. What has happened to this organization since those days I know not, but I do not think that it will be seriously contested

A Persian Holiday

that Persia no longer holds, as it once did, the premier place among the rug-makers of the world.

The principal monument of Hamadan, which is not a town of remarkable architectural merit, is the authentic tomb of Esther and Mordecai in the principal square. It has no doubt been fully described by others and I shall not venture on a discussion of its details beyond saying that, as a building, it was charming rather than great. Like everything else in the town, however, it was completely dominated by another monument not raised by human hands—the mighty cone of Alwand, whose summit is some 11,000 feet above sea-level. Not being a mountaineer in any sense of the term, nevertheless I can never see a high place on the earth's surface without an uncontrollable desire to see the earth's surface from its summit. Alwand affected me in that way and I had no great difficulty in satisfying my ambition. Procuring a guide through the co-operation of Da'ud, I set out on foot to traverse the outer ramparts of the mountain which runs down almost to the fringe of the city. The ascent of the peak itself, providing lovely and comprehensive views of the vast mountainous country around us, presented no serious difficulty. Here and there "from the caves of the shelving hill" sparkling streams gushed forth from their lofty fountains to trickle down through lush, boggy pastures such as one finds among the mountains of Wales and Scotland. Alwand is of granite, rich in mica, whose golden particles swirled in the spring pools reflecting the sun. In a few cavities, shaded from the sun's heat throughout the day, there still lingered some patches of snow from the forgotten winter. And from the summit I commanded a glorious view of the Kangavar and Hamadan plains on either side. The former stretched back between its rugged flanks into the distance where Kirmanshah, invisible, nestles into the valley on the hither side of the final barrier which fringes the Tigris plain. The Hamadan plain, lying north-west by south-east extends from the foot of Alwand to the lower barrier of hills, which divides it from the Qazwin basin. On our left the mountains of Kurdistan, receding into the far distance closed in the plain, while more mountains lay to our right, embracing the

A Persian Holiday

highlands of Sultanabad and veiling the Persian desert from our view. The Hamadan plain is divided into two sections by a low ridge in its midst extending east and west. Descending by a different and somewhat steeper route we rested awhile at the village of Alwand at the foot of the mountain to drink tea with the hospitable occupants of the local police-post, before returning home.

It was not till 10th August that I left Hamadan. For two days before that I had been engaged in an exasperating but amusing effort to procure transport. The modern chauffeur and garage-owner have adopted all the vices of the ancient muleteers without acquiring any of their virtues. It was always a case of hard bargaining to arrive at any agreement, and even then the trouble was not over as the other party as often as not repented of the easy terms to which he had agreed within half an hour of signing a contract and receiving a small sum as earnest-money. Da'ud very kindly offered to save me all the trouble of such arrangements by undertaking them himself. The first day he produced a man willing to take me to Qazwin for eighty Tumans,¹ but had omitted to make the important discovery that his car was totally unfit for further work. Somekh, Da'ud's confidential servant, having discovered this, transferred the earnest-money to a Methuselah who was willing to do the job for ninety Tumans, but, on seeing me and my obviously benevolent countenance, had demanded the payment of two-thirds of the sum down. This was quite unreasonable, and, on my expressing an opinion to that effect, he threw down the five Tumans which he had received from Somekh and stamped away in a rage. I suggested to my host that, as he had taken so much trouble already, I would now make arrangements for myself and, within a short period, Isma'il appeared with an Armenian owner-driver called Antinian, who was willing to take me to Teheran for 145 Tumans. Of this I was to pay him forty-five Tumans down and the balance at Teheran, while he was to meet all expenses for the car during the journey, including toll-fees. He knew that I intended staying some days at Qazwin and tried to insert in our agreement

¹ 1 Tuman equals 3s. 6d.

A Persian Holiday

a clause compelling me to pay his expenses during our stay there. To this I agreed readily, subject to the condition that he should pay my hotel and other incidental expenses for every day that we spent on the road on account of the breakdown of his car. As the distance could be covered easily in two days by any reasonable car and I proposed to spend three days at Qazwin the proposed arrangement was advantageous to him, but he would have none of it, knowing his car of course, and we agreed to say nothing about expenses at Qazwin. So I paid him forty-five Tumans and everything was satisfactorily settled.

On the morning of the 10th my traps were carried out to the Esther and Mordecai square, where the car awaited us. Having said a grateful good-bye to Da'ud and his secretary, Salih, I was all ready to start, but Antinian remembered that he hadn't settled some of his debts and had no money to settle them with. I could not prevent him creating further delay by a last minute effort to arrange things with his (imaginary) creditors, but I did flatly refuse to assist in the settlement financially. He was up against the choice of conveying me on my journey or refunding the money he had received in advance. And being quite unable to do the latter because he had spent the money, he decided philosophically to do the former. The gears grated and the car carried us to the chain, where people were, of course, awaiting to relieve us of some of our money. However, this was clearly Antinian's business, but he looked at me. I looked back at him and became aware that he had no money. The toll-fee was ten Tumans but, as we had actually started, I reckoned that there could now be no playing false. With a generous gesture I paid him a further advance of twenty Tumans against the balance of the fare. Thereupon he paid the toll-man and remembered that he had no oil. He searched the car in vain for the tin he had never put into it and, in the end, we had to go back—only a mile—to enable him to purchase a tin in replacement of the "missing" one. And then we really did start.

It took us five hours, owing to minor mechanical incidents to clear the fifty-mile plain and arrive at Razan, a toll-station at

A Persian Holiday

the foot of the hill barrier forming the Qazwin-Hamadan divide. Here I decided to stop for lunch in a charming garden attached to the toll-house, whither I was pursued by the toll-keeper, who declined an offer of a share of my lunch, but insisted on providing me with tea to wash it down. He was a Russian who, with his wife—formerly a teacher in the Russian school at Qazwin—eked out a solitary, but not unhappy, existence in this benighted spot on a princely salary of forty Tumans a month. He was a very well-known character during the British occupation, when Army Officers frequently made use of his chalet as a shooting-box. Among other things he was a dog-fancier and the owner of some high-class Russian pointers, one of which I saw while another had some time before been purloined by a passing Tommy or, as he suggested with an aggrieved air, by someone who had spent a night as his guest. I did not have the pleasure of meeting his wife, but he was certainly an attractive person. His main grievance was the difficulty of finding vodka or anything else fit to drink in these wilds, and I registered an (unfulfilled) vow to have a bottle of whiskey in my luggage at my next passing—in point of fact I never passed the spot on my return journey, as I took the route from Sultanabad to Hamadan. From his English guests he had picked up three or four formal phrases and from the Persians about the same number of words, but he talked excellent Russian—a language of which I knew no word—and we managed to be quite conversational, partly with the co-operation of a Persian clerk who appeared to talk Russian quite well.

Such encounters with the unconsidered flotsam and jetsam of life's stream are the very salt of travel. It may be a tramp on an English highway, uncertain of his next meal or lodging, but bravely hoping that some party picnicking by the roadside may hand him the keys of heaven: or an European castaway in the wilds of Asia, forgotten of his own folk, but not forgetting, and making the best of a hard world in strange surroundings on the exiguous combings of a barren beach. So I mused as we set forth on the next lap of our journey. At Manian, a petty hamlet, we began the actual ascent to the pass and from

A Persian Holiday

this point on we were in constant trouble with the car. I did most of the climb on foot and reached the summit an hour and a half before it. It was already near sunset with an easy run down to Sultan Bulagh, a chain-station about half a mile below the summit, and thence to Ava, where we found masses of corn gathered in from the surrounding mountains for threshing. On the steep descent we had an adventure which might have been a disaster. I could scarcely believe my eyes at the sight of a complete tyre racing wildly down the road by our side and then plunging down the hill at a bend of the track. It was one of our own tyres which had wrenched itself bodily off one of the rear wheels without producing the shock one might have expected—probably because the rough slow passage of the car over a bad patch of road produced enough bumping to make an extra crash imperceptible. Some delay ensued while the truant tyre was recovered from the depths below and refitted to the wheel. In the growing darkness the road seemed far too dangerous to justify prolonged experiments. So we decided to spend the night at Ava, where a sergeant of the local gendarmerie post provided me with a clean upper chamber in the last house of the village. For the rest—with tea to drink, food to eat and a carpet to sleep on—I had nothing to complain of. It had taken us ten hours from Hamadan and I was tired—so I slept well. Next morning we resumed early down a fairly good but steep road winding among the crags that hedged in the narrow valley of the Kara Rud far below us. On either side of us rose the gaunt masses of the sandstone mountains with nearly perpendicular strata, overlain in parts, 2,000 feet above the valley, by the horizontal beds of a later formation—probably Miocene like the richly fossiliferous limestone of the Hamadan plain. Near the road I saw a fossil plant impression in a mass of rock too large to load on to the labouring car and too solid to yield to my efforts to break off the piece I coveted.

At Ab-i-garm at the lower level of the valley I halted awhile to inspect the “baths” and hot springs from which the village derives its name. The hot water, not actually boiling but hot enough for the most fastidious bather, issues at several points

A Persian Holiday

through the pores of a slab of rock—apparently limestone though possibly of volcanic tuff or some such material—about 100 feet long and twenty feet broad and high near the edge of the stream. The bath consists of a cistern, seven feet square and two feet deep, and roofed over for reasons of privacy, through which the water flows into the Kara Rud channel. In two other pools and at other points in the rock the water seemed to be no more than lukewarm, but everywhere there is a pervading odour of sulphur which emphasizes the stench created by the insanitary habits of visitors to this famous Spa. My intention of bathing resolved itself into a decision to content myself with a perfunctory wash. Da'ud at Hamadan had told me that nobody could remain long in this water with impunity, and that on one occasion he had suffered for his temerity with a fainting fit accompanied by the transformation of his skin to a bluish tint. It reminded me of an Arabian experience related by Carlo Guarmani, one of the early explorers of the desert peninsula, who bathed in a rock-pool and was rescued from it in a fainting condition by passing gypsies. I have always hoped to discover that pool, but have not yet succeeded in doing so.

From Ab-i-garm the valley gradually widens out and we came almost imperceptibly to the edge of the Qazwin plain which is thus wedged in by the range we had just crossed and the greater mountains of Alburz on its northern side, which now became clearly visible with the oasis of Qazwin nestling against their skirts. A cross-range links the two mountain systems along the western edge of the plain, in a deep bulge of which lies the town and district of Zinjan. The great plain is evidently very fertile. Its expanse is dotted with numerous villages, while the road from Qazwin to Rasht on the Caspian rises out of it over a dip at the western extremity of Alburz. At Nahavand, a large village on the road, we stopped for a cup of tea; and further on, at the fork formed by the road to Zinjan, we halted for lunch in the village of Siah Dihan, the "black villages," where the huts, now desolate and deserted, of a marching-post of the British army were still in evidence. I had my solitary meal in one of them.

A Persian Holiday

The car was now on its last legs and found the greatest difficulty in grinding along in low gear on an easy road. I walked and rode in turns according to its mood of the moment, and occasional spatters of light rain made the walking quite pleasant. Five miles short of Sultanabad our petrol gave out—it was 6 p.m. then though we had made but little progress during the day. In desperation I walked on and, having refreshed myself with cucumbers purchased from a boy in a roadside garden, reached the chain at Sultanabad. Acting on the advice of the two Russians in charge of the toll-station, I telephoned to Mr Gow of the Imperial Bank at Qazwin to send out some petrol and sat down to wait until its arrival. Meanwhile Antinian had, at my expense, purchased a tin of petrol for fourteen Tumans from a passing car and arrived at the station just as I was beginning to wonder how the Russians would like the idea of putting me up for the night. In spite of the darkness we continued our journey in the hope of making Qazwin. But at 8 p.m., as we were grinding along in low gear with only two pistons working, the engine subsided with an alarming rattle. It was all up with the car now. Antinian trudged off to Qazwin, whence he would send out a carriage or two to convey us and our belongings to the town. Isma'il and I sat down by the roadside to wait patiently. Hunger began to gnaw at my vitals, and I groped about in a neighbouring vineyard to find only three bunches of delicious grapes, one of which I made over to Isma'il. Having eaten them we sat on smoking until, at 9.30, a couple of rickety carriages arrived. The car was abandoned to the care of a yokel, and the carriages returned at full speed. In the darkness it seemed a dangerous proceeding as we charged over perilous canal bridges and through narrow streets. But we arrived safely half an hour later in the Broadway of the Shah Boulevard, and I heaved a sigh of relief as we entered the portals of the Grand Hotel after fifteen hours on the road since leaving Ava.

Qazwin looked as if it had seen better days in the not very distant past. In design, if not in execution, its layout was admirable and infinitely superior to that of Hamadan. But everything seemed to be in a dilapidated state and decay was

A Persian Holiday

the keynote of the modern city. All the gates—built in an uniformed stepped-pinnacle style with minaret-like projections rising gracefully from the outer edge of each step—were in a badly damaged state, and most of the ornamental tiling had fallen out. The circuit wall of the city lacked solidity, and was badly breached at many points. The splendid remnants of the Jami' Masjid—and the little that remained of it, two minarets and a fine large dome, was really splendid—told the same tale of neglect and decay. This mosque is said to have been built on the site of an ancient fire-temple, but it was only during the Safawi period that Qazwin enjoyed considerable prominence and became for a short time the actual capital of Persia. The Shah Boulevard has certainly succeeded in retaining something of its former splendour, but the avenues which once graced most of the principal streets have been allowed to fall into a somewhat patchy condition. Within the city ramparts were numerous houses and walls enclosing spacious gardens, which have been allowed to crumble into ruins, and it certainly did not seem to me at the time of my visit that any one was ever likely to worry about rebuilding them. Under the new conditions of Iran, however, it may well be that this pessimistic estimate has been belied by events, but I have no knowledge of the existing state of a city which certainly deserved to be rescued from the decay that menaced it. *Agar Iran murabbi dasht!* If only Persia had somebody to care for her! was the burden of many conversations I had during the few days of my sojourn at Qazwin. And now, at least, that hopeless prayer had been answered, and I have little doubt that something of the ancient glories of the land is in a fair way to restoration. At any rate, they have now got what they never had before in any age, however distinguished—a railway that links the Caspian Sea with the Persian Gulf. And it is something that Persia has not had to thank a foreign Power for the uprooting of the corruption and dishonour that disgraced her under the regime of the later Shahs of the Kajar dynasty.

One remarkable contrast between Qazwin and the southern cities, Hamadan and Kirmanshah, struck me very forcibly. In

A Persian Holiday

by the orderly behaviour of the huge crowd, from which willing helpers were recruited without difficulty as required.

Thanks to my introductions from Hamadan I saw a good deal of the Bahaï community of Qazwin. Its leader, Mirza Musa Khan Hakimbashi was also the principal physician of the town, though at this time he had largely withdrawn from practice, being of advanced years and in failing health. In reply to my letter, with which I sent him my letters of introduction, his assistant, Dr 'Amidullah Khan, called at the hotel and invited me to lunch with his chief to meet the principal local Bahaïs. I drove round accordingly to his house in an alley leading off Sa'di Street, and was received at the door by the Hakimbashi himself—a venerable, grey-bearded and stoutly-built old gentleman of extremely courteous bearing and somewhat deaf. He shepherded me into a room, in which more than a dozen of his co-religionists were already gathered and, after introductions, we all sat round a table well-covered with refreshments—mainly sweetmeats and fruit including the excellent dark-coloured local grape called *Shahani*. This grape, of which the Qazwin vineyards are justly proud, was said to produce an excellent brand of wine—not manufactured, however, by the Muslim population. I had already noted at the hotel the excellence of a local white wine which was much superior to that made by the Jewish community at Hamadan.

The conversation was very general, and I noticed that the company was by no means disposed to harp on the tenets and practices of the sect. The Hakimbashi told me of a world tour he had made in the days of Baha-ullah himself, the first prophet of the sect. Travelling via Baku (or Badkuba as it is called) to Russia and Germany, he had visited England and France, and returned via Marseilles, Egypt and 'Akka (Acre, the home of the Bahaï leaders since their expulsion from Persia) to Persia. His clearest memories of the tour were of Russia and Germany, where he seemed to have had amusing experiences with railway officials but had, he proudly said, evaded their efforts to collect illegal remuneration at his expense.

The walls of the room were studded with photographs of

A Persian Holiday

various Bahaï groups and several large portraits of 'Abdul Baha, the second and reigning prophet. There was also a conventional representation of the Bab, and perhaps the most interesting of the mural decorations was what looked like an empty frame but was seen, on closer inspection, to contain quite a large number of silvery or grizzled hairs. These purported to be, and doubtless were, hairs from the venerable beard of 'Abdul Baha or Baha-ullah. I have in these few lines brought together the three principal characters of the Bahaï movement, and I do not intend to enter upon a lengthy dissertation on the sect, for full particulars of which my readers can go to my old friend and master, the late Professor E. G. Browne of Cambridge, and other authorities. It is, however, important to remember the respective places of these three characters in the development and history of the movement. Its actual originator was the Bab, who flourished in the middle of the last century, but was not, nor claimed to be, himself a prophet. Like St John the Baptist he professed to be only the forerunner of the expected leader and did in that capacity fix the shape of things to come. He foretold not merely one prophet but two, and he left no doubt that, after the death of the second, the leadership of the movement would fall, without, however, any claim to prophetic inspiration, by free election of the whole brotherhood, on whomsoever was so chosen. In due course the prophet appeared in the person of Baha-ullah who reigned for his appointed span and whose cloak descended on his son 'Abdul Baha, who was at this time still alive and residing at 'Akka, where I had the honour of visiting him rather more than a year later. He died only a few years ago, to be succeeded in the secular leadership of the Bahaï flock by his eldest son, Taufiq, at that time an undergraduate at Oxford! With Gandhi, another saint, on the roll of her *alumni*, Oxford can indeed claim no small share in the shaping of modern oriental philosophy. But neither Gandhi nor Taufiq, for reasons already stated, can lay claim to prophetic inspiration. They play rather a role not unlike that of the Califs of Islam subsequent to those entitled Orthodox or rightly-guided (*Rashidin*), though neither of them enjoys the temporal sovereignty which the Islamic

A Persian Holiday

Califs claimed and asserted up to the abolition of the institution in 1924. I must, however, desist from the temptation to comment on Califate developments since that date—a fruitful subject though prickly—and return to the Bahaï community at Qazwin.

It was the underlying assumption of the Bab's ministry that his own labours and the lifetimes of two actual prophets—covering as the event proved a period but little short of a century—would be sufficient to establish the new faith beyond danger of disintegration in the absence of a leader claiming direct personal divine inspiration. There can be no doubt that the movement blossomed at an opportune moment for Persia and served to stem the rising tide of Shia' bigotry, which was certainly in those days a definite bar to education and progress—however, it may have been mellowed in quite recent times by the more spacious contacts of the modern world. Nevertheless, after the early successes of the movement in converting a large body of Persian opinion to its way of thinking—possibly on broader religious lines than any other faith has ever essayed—Bahaïs began to lose ground in the land of its birth both to the original enemy—uncompromising Shia' opposition—and to a new one not envisaged by the Bab, namely modernism. But it did succeed in spreading, to some extent, to other lands, to lands indeed which would have seemed to the Bab beyond the reach of his wildest dreams; and America to-day has a small but compact Bahaï element, which serves to keep alive the memory of a movement which, as far as one can judge, is now of but little significance in the Middle East.

It seemed to me, from my contact with the Bahaïs of Hamadan and Qazwin, that the movement—apart from its generally socialistic ethics, an essential element in any effective religion—was suffering already from an inherent weakness of all religious creeds. This was a tendency to dogmatic formalism, intended by its champions as no more than a rallying point for the professed adherents of the faith, but likely to acquire undue importance in the scheme of their society and so to weaken the movement's chance of wider acceptance in a somewhat different world, whose tendency was, and is, rather to shake

A Persian Holiday

off the trammels of religion altogether than to embrace a new creed. As a straw shows the direction of the wind, it seemed to me that those few hairs of a prophetic beard in a vacant frame presaged the ultimate failure of a movement which had a number of entirely admirable features. Like political socialism, of the democratic type, it seemed to be afraid of some of its own more revolutionary ideals.

The rest of the afternoon I spent in the great public garden which filled the angle formed by the meeting of Sa'di Street and the Shah Boulevard. In the course of my wanderings I sat down on a bench opposite a large and apparently empty building. There was quite a number of people about enjoying the shade and charm of the garden. Among them I noticed a considerable number of military officers in uniform, one of whom, obviously more important and certainly more magnificent than the rest, was strolling about in earnest conversation with a friend in civilian garb. I sensed a general air of restiveness, as of expectation, but thought little of it beyond wondering whether perhaps the Governor, whose palace stood at the end of the central avenue of the garden, was expected to issue forth for a drive or walk. The splendid-looking man and his companion chanced to pass fairly close to my bench, whereupon courtesy prompted me to rise with the usual formal salutation on my lips. They stopped in friendly fashion and engaged me in conversation, asking who I was and whence. In turn I asked if the large building at the end of the avenue was the Governor's residence and, receiving an affirmative reply, made bold to ask whether they and the other people in the garden were expecting the Governor to appear. "He is the Governor himself," explained the civilian. "*Zud gufti*—you spoke too soon!" laughed the Governor jovially. I apologized profusely for my impertinence, but he put me at my ease and we stood talking yet awhile until we had exhausted the ordinary subjects of polite conversation. Thus I had the unexpected and unsolicited honour of an informal meeting with Khuda Yar Khan, the Military Governor of Qazwin. As a mere tourist staying at a hotel I had not thought it appropriate to ask for an interview, but fortune had favoured me. He was a fine upstanding figure

A Persian Holiday

of a man—every inch a soldier. And he was here as Military Governor owing to the proximity of the Qazwin district to the war-zone embracing Rasht and Mazandaran, where the tribes with active assistance from the Bolshevik forces, were up in arms and had not yet been subdued. From other sources I gathered that Khuda Yar, as a nominee of the fallen Cabinet of Saiyid Zia'-al-Din, was likely to be superseded in his present post as soon as the new government, resulting from the *coup d'état*, found it convenient to make a change. Doubtless, therefore, he did not long survive his friendly conversation with me. What strikes me most forcibly in retrospect, however, is the fact that the *coup d'état* of Riza Khan, destined to be an epoch-making event, was at this time still, as it were, in suspense. In the more or less immediate future it might collapse like other revolutionary movements in Persia or elsewhere. One heard vague, though naturally hushed whispers, of the seizing of the reins of government by a military officer, whom some folk remembered, and not so long back, as the smart corporal of some Legation guard. The fact that Persia had opened a new and extremely important chapter of her long history was entirely lost on me—from which I conclude that those who had had long experience of the country were at that time by no means impressed by the possibilities of the new regime. In any case its effective control at that time scarcely extended beyond the confines of Teheran.

It was now to the capital itself that I was bound. The preliminaries of my journey were even more complicated and distressing than the uncertainties that had marked my departure from Hamadan. A visit, accompanied for decency's sake by a proper amount of waiting in ante-rooms, to the *Nazmiya* or police headquarters was an essential first step. While waiting I saw a party of Bolshevik prisoners, apparently captured by Persian troops in the course of recent operations in Mazandaran. The Russian Legation at Teheran was interested in procuring their release, and to this end its Military Attaché, a smart cavalry officer, had been sent down to see the authorities at Qazwin, where there was also a detachment of Cossacks—an unliquidated remnant of the old regime. Like myself he was a

A Persian Holiday

guest at the Grand Hotel, a spacious building fronting on the Shah Boulevard and owned by an Armenian who provided visitors with palatial accommodation, but only moderate victuals. In the days of the British occupation he had had no reason to complain of his speculation, but at this time he was evidently finding it hard to make both ends meet. He had to pay a monthly rent bill of forty Tumans, while the dozen or more rooms, for which the daily tariff was one Tuman, were seldom more than a quarter—at most half—occupied. Among my fellow-guests was a merchant from Baku, who claimed to be French-Swiss, though he knew so little French that I imagine he was a German, long domiciled in Russia. A smart Persian officer of the Cossacks and another in attendance on the Bolshevik Military Attaché completed the roll of residents in the hotel during these days.

After a long wait I was admitted to the august presence of the second-in-command at the police office, from whom I procured a permit to proceed to Teheran. I was then passed down for the completion of the necessary documents to a clerk, who was a little puzzled by my name, but had no difficulty in guessing my age and nationality. At any rate he wrote "Armenian—22" in the appropriate columns of his register. I allowed the latter entry to pass unchallenged as a spontaneous compliment to my youthful appearance—in any case there is not a vast difference between twenty-two and thirty-six. But I demurred to Armenian, though I wondered at the time whether it would not be safer to let it pass, and the necessary correction was made in the records. "And languages?" he asked looking up at me. "English?" Yes, he wrote down without waiting for my answer. "And Persian," piped the constable who introduced me, "just a little." But this highly improbable statement was not considered worth record or investigation by the clerk.

Pocketing the pass I departed, admiring as I went the really admirable flower-garden of the courtyard, whose enormous gateway, facing down the Shah Boulevard was extremely imposing with its rich covering of decorative tile work. Next morning Antinian brought the car round to the hotel two hours late. Even so he had pawned all his spare tyres and tubes

A Persian Holiday

in pledge of debts, the nature of which I did not ascertain. Furthermore he had no petrol and no money. I declined to help him, and his creditors, who had come with him in the hope of converting the tyres into cash, refused to part with the former or to supply petrol. After much wrangling to the accompaniment of the importunate cries of myriads of beggars, I made Antinian drive me to the *Nazmiya*, where I laid my case before the second-in-command, who behaved very reasonably. "You have made a bargain," he said to Antinian, "to take this gentleman to Teheran. You must either do that or repay him every cent he has paid you." At this point the Chief of Police entered the room—a big man in very smart uniform with a ferocious look about him. Hearing the cause of dispute, he invited Antinian to walk into his private parlour, whence with a few ferocious remarks he drove the Armenian back to us, terrified and humiliated. We went out together and I said to Antinian "Now if you want to see that man again, just let me know, will you?" The pledgee of the tyres, who was also the owner of the petrol we needed, refused to part with either unless paid for them—an entirely reasonable attitude. So I delivered an ultimatum to the chauffeur. "I will buy the tyres and the petrol, but will not pay you another cent on our bargain and will retain the tyres till you repay me their value. If you have any complaint about this we can always revisit the gentleman at the *Nazmiya* who is a witness between us." That was enough. I paid for the tyres and petrol, and I kept my promise at Teheran except that, after keeping him in suspense for two or three days, I relinquished the tyres which were of no use to me. The net result of my transactions with Antinian, who certainly deserved and received no consideration for his uniformly ungentlemanly conduct, was that my trip from Hamadan to Teheran cost me 140 Tumans in all instead of 145 plus gratuity—a saving of at least £3 after a full measure of amusement and edification.

So on 15th August we started. I was not sorry to be quit of Qazwin with its decayed buildings and its infuriating beggars, but the ensuing journey was a penance. The car was not in a fit condition for a journey of nearly 100 miles. We grated and

A Persian Holiday

stumbled along the rather uninteresting and by no means perfect road till 5.30 p.m., by which time we had only reached the *Chapar-Khana* (post-station) of Hishmatabad, about half-way to the capital, after about six hours' travelling. I decided to halt here for the night and spent the time till sunset climbing an outlying spur of the Alburz range. I slept on the roof of the post-station, where I found the gendarmes very attentive and the local grapes an excellent substitute for dinner.

It was not till after noon the next day that we arrived at Teheran, having taken twelve hours of actual travelling to cover the distance from Qazwin. A little beyond Hishmatabad—and reckoned as the actual halfway point between Qazwin and the capital—we passed the very attractive mosque-shrine of Imamzada Yangi Imam. Beyond it a number of low knolls or barrows were doubtless the sites of ancient hamlets or forts. And then we came to Karaj, a village with a toll-gate and a bridge spanning a rapid torrent, on the hither side of the Shimran ridge which masks Teheran from the south-west. It took us some time to skirt the protruding spurs of the ridge and reach the Teheran plain, but a number of attractive villages on the hillside curbed my impatience to see the capital, while I wondered which of the many summits of the Alburz range ahead of us might be Damavand itself. Suddenly all doubt was banished from my mind. Away to the left, at right angles to our course and not in the direction in which my eyes had been fixed, the great cone stood out head and shoulders higher than anything in the range extending on either side of it. And very beautiful it was with its white flutings of snow gathering to an all-white summit with slender spirals of smoke ascending from it into the air. It was, indeed, magnificent, perfect in shape and, I think, the most beautiful mountain I have ever seen. Almost at the same moment the dark dull patch that was Teheran appeared ahead of us with the sun glinting on the golden dome of Shah 'Abdul 'Adhim to southward of it. It was a memorable scene—it is its setting that makes Teheran, which is itself somewhat disappointing from a distance. It is but a mass of dark foliage and not a single building stands out—at any rate as seen from this side. The capital,

A Persian Holiday

in its shroud of green lies in a hollow towards which we descended a gentle slope. After passing a few outlying houses, we reached the moat and ramparts which completely encircle the city. The Qazwin gate, by which we entered, is a modern affair of tiles and minarets without distinction. My pass was examined and returned to me with instructions to exchange it for a proper permit at the *Nazmiya*—a formality that I neglected without untoward consequences. So we passed on through broad streets and shady avenues to the boulevard (Khiyaban) of 'Ala-al-Daula, in which I was set down at the door of the Hotel de France.

It was now 16th August and I had exhausted about five weeks of my leave. The hotel was unpretentious, but comfortable enough with a small staff of Russian maids to look after the guests. One of the latter was a young Russian, in business I think, who showed me some of the night-life of Teheran, which seemed for the most part to centre round a number of gambling dens. Not being addicted to roulette and other popular forms of gambling, I did not find this very amusing, but there seemed to be little enough in the way of alternatives. The days were, however, full enough as there was plenty to see in the city—some fine buildings and many fine streets and squares and, above all, a bazaar in which one could wander endlessly without surfeit and in which, through merchants to whom I had introductions from Baghdad, I purchased a stock of pleasing rugs and carpets. I also had the good fortune to be here for the Muharram ceremonies, which this year fell in the early part of September. I believe that recent legislation, in keeping with the modernistic tendencies of the country, has curbed the gross realism which formerly marked this supreme passion play of the Shia', to which the bazaar and many neighbouring streets of the capital were unreservedly handed over during the days of the celebration. I had already seen the Muharram ceremonies in other towns of India and Mesopotamia, but I have not seen them again since my experience at Teheran, as my life since then has lain almost entirely outside the sphere of Shia' influence. Nowhere had I seen them more elaborate or grimmer than in the Persian capital.

A Persian Holiday

But there was one feature of my holiday visit to these parts which, though by no means unique, is (or was at that time) sufficiently unusual to be placed as a crown on my Persian experiences. I have already introduced my readers to the loveliest mountain in the world, and I have confessed to an incurable passion for looking down on the world from the highest point within reasonable reach. There was, therefore, nothing strange in the gradual development in my breast of a desire to see Persia from the top of Damavand. Besides that I had a peculiar link with the mountain dating back several years to the time when Sir George Grierson, having examined me as an Indian Civil Service probationer in the Urdu language, marked me generously enough, but afterwards confided to me in private that my Urdu work was horribly saturated with *Persica lues*. To cure me of this disease before it went too far he had recommended me to read an Urdu novel entitled *Firdaus-i-Barin* (quite a good Persian title be it noted) by a nineteenth-century author named 'Abdul Halim Sharar. He was good enough to present me there and then with a copy of the work, and I not only read it, but prepared a translation of it for the edification of other students of the language. My precious manuscript is presumably still extant among the archives of the Board of Examiners at Calcutta, but, so far as I know, it has never been published. More's the pity for the scene of the novel is laid in these very mountains of Alburz whose crown is Damavand itself, round which is woven the story of the Old Man of the Mountain and the terrestrial Paradise of the Assassins:

*Agar firdaus bar ru-i-Zamin ast,
Hamin ast! Hamin ast! Hamin ast!*

“If Paradise is to be found on the face of the earth, it is this, this, this!”

How my ambition was to be achieved I did not know, but in the course of my sojourn at Teheran I naturally made contact with the British Legation, over which at this time Mr Norman presided as Minister. Part of his time was spent in the Legation, but in the warmer weather he and his staff migrated to

A Persian Holiday

the cooler flanks of Shimran where the Minister has a summer residence at Gulhak, a most delightful hill-station swollen to considerable proportions by the summer exodus of the Europeans. I readily acceded to the suggestion that I should also go there for a short sojourn, and it so chanced that Havard (the Oriental Secretary who had been at Cambridge with me thirteen years before and had been at Teheran ever since), Bateman, Malet and other members of the staff were then organizing an excursion to the Lar river, famous for its trout. I joined the expedition which landed me in a fishing camp at the very foot of Damavand, and there I helped in a somewhat amateurish fashion to catch, and in quite a professional manner, to eat the trout of the district. But busy diplomats get scanty leave for such frivolities and, when the rest had to return to Gulhak, I departed alone with a haversack and a fishing-rod in the opposite direction down the Lar. I fished as I went, but I did a very silly thing. So much of my time was inevitably spent in the water and wet stockings are so unpleasant that I decided to discard mine, proceeding gaily on my way in shorts and canvas shoes. So I went all day, dawdling at will, until I began to realize that the hot sun was attacking my bare legs, wetted and chilled by the icy water. By the late afternoon, having taken a toss or two down the steep slopes, covered with loose rough scree, and broken my rod in the process, I was in considerable agony. It was clearly time to consider seriously where and how I was to spend the night. My scanty provisions having been consumed for lunch, I could hope for no food—one can't catch trout with a broken rod—unless I could reach Ask, a little village on the river bank lower down. I, therefore, abandoned the river and made for the mule-track higher up but, in my painful condition, this was not so easy as it seemed and I arrived on the track after a stiff climb so exhausted and so late (sunset in fact) that my hopes of reaching the village did not seem very bright. After an hour of rather painful progress, I came across a party of Kurdish muleteers with their women-folk camping by the roadside. I accordingly decided to give up and crave their hospitality, which was rather roughly and grudgingly accorded. Milk and coarse bread was their fare

A Persian Holiday

and that was good enough for me. By this time it was getting bitterly cold—we were about 7,000 feet above sea-level—and I shivered miserably except in my legs which burned like fire. I was forced to beg for covering and one of the women produced an extremely dirty sheepskin coat and some coarse cloths in and under which I lay without ceremony to eke out an unforgettable night of physical misery. My hosts had the appearance of professional cut-throats, big, burly, coarse men, but their women were pleasant to look at and very kind. In the morning I accompanied them, riding a mule, every rough pace of which caused me acute misery, to Ask, where I decided to spend the day in comparative civilization. At any rate, I could buy food here and Ask was a remarkable place in that it had a well-developed thermal establishment with sulphur baths. So I rewarded my benefactors of the night as liberally as I could and remained at Ask, lying up to nurse my painful legs and bathing in the sulphur waters at intervals during the day.

Next day I certainly felt better, though I could only hobble about as the skin of my legs was taut or in tatters. Nevertheless I was not going to be balked of my climb and decided to spend the day at a little hamlet on the flank of the mountain, visible from Ask, and about 2,000 feet above it. With some difficulty I managed to get there early enough to have a good rest and to canvass the possibility of getting to the summit with the village folk, among whom I found a sturdy, vigorous old man, not less than seventy, who assured me that with a very early start we could get up the mountain and back again before dark. That meant about twelve or thirteen hours' energetic exertion, and I engaged his services at the price he named for the morrow. We then procured provisions for the day, some tea and a kettle—and all was ready.

At the first sign of dawn we were off, our starting point being some 8,000 feet above sea-level according to my aneroid and our destination about 19,000 feet. I was feeling much better, but was not really in fit condition for a climb of 11,000 feet and back. Another day of rest would have made a great difference, but I was anxious not to waste time unnecessarily. In the early stages, at any rate, there was nothing difficult

A Persian Holiday

about the climb—a good, solid trudge and no more. The lower slopes of the mountain up to about 12,000 or 13,000 feet were well covered with scrub and bushes, and in due course we arrived at that point. Beyond, there was nothing but scree and rock, absolutely bare, without grass or vegetation of any kind.

My guide decided to leave the kettle here to be picked up on our return—with no fuel for a fire it was obviously no good thinking of tea. So on we went, making steady but slow progress, care being needed in some places where the scree was loose, though otherwise it was fairly straightforward. At about 16,000 or 17,000 feet we came into contact with the lowest streaks of snow, and the slope became distinctly steeper, but there was always plenty of rock to give one a foothold or handhold. The exertion was, however, becoming more and more exhausting and my legs were beginning to be painful again. I had to sit down and rest at frequent intervals and our progress inevitably became slower and slower while the inexorable sun seemed to be racing for all it was worth. We struggled on, the guide cheerily encouraging me and going up himself like a young man. I felt ashamed at being so outclassed, but I had a valid excuse in my wretched legs and he understood my trouble. The snow thickened as we neared the top and necessitated caution, but I limped up in short bursts with intermediate rests, and at long last we stood on the grand summit of Damavand, on the lip of its snow-covered crater, from which thin streams of smoke issued feebly here and there. It was now nearly 4 p.m., and we had taken about twelve hours to do the climb. We could not afford to waste much time on the summit, and, in fact, there was not much need to do so. To my intense disappointment the whole of the northern scene, including the forests on that side of Alburz and the Caspian Sea, was completely blotted out by heavy clouds. Southward with no cloud in the sky we could see a hundred miles or more over Teheran and Gulhak and the vast plain beyond them between its mountain barriers. On either side of us the great northern mountain range of Persia stretched out into the far distance with an average elevation of 12,000 or 13,000 feet, but dwarfed by the lofty solitary pinnacle on which we stood. A

A Persian Holiday

cold wind discouraged any temptation to prolong our stay. It was essential that we should get below the snow-line before dark, and the sun was already unpleasantly near its setting beyond the distant hills. I collected a few lumps of yellow sulphur from the crater as a souvenir of my visit and we set forth on our descent.

If it had been fatiguing going up, it was by no means easy going down and each of us took a toss or two in our hurry to get off the snow, which we did succeed in doing before the darkness really set in. After that, down the bare scree slopes it was sheer tribulation as we groped and felt our way, and it became bitterly cold. Our progress was extremely slow, and the ordeal seemed to affect the guide more than myself. Perhaps it was the cold that got at him but, whatever the reason, he began to behave queerly. He would suddenly collapse on the scree and complain of cold. I urged him to keep moving and told him that, if we could reach our kettle and the vegetation, we could afford to halt with a fire to warm us and boil the water for tea. Then he would spring to life again, but on one occasion he tripped and fell. I don't think he really hurt himself, but he began to weep like a child, and I was really alarmed at the way his teeth chattered and, to warm him, I unbuttoned my coat and held him in a close embrace to get it round him too. After a while he recovered sufficiently to make another effort. I had no idea how far we had got on our descent, but suddenly the guide stepped aside by an upstanding rock and brandished the kettle in my face with a hoarse grunt of triumph. It was, indeed, astonishing how accurately we had kept to our course in the pitchy darkness—doubtless it was instinct that had guided him. Anyway we knew that we were now down in the zone of vegetation, but our first attempts to kindle a fire with slightly damp mosses and green bushes were a complete failure. A little lower down, however, we did find satisfactory, though fast-burning fuel, and were able for the first time to get a little warmth into our chilled bodies as we sat over the kettle which took an unconscionably long time in boiling. Tea made all the difference to us and there was nothing more to worry about—nothing but to grope our way down through the

A Persian Holiday

increasing scrub. At length the first streak of the false dawn appeared in the eastern sky, gradually merging into the dawn twilight, which slowly broadened into a rosy flush heralding the day. A covey of ghost-like Imperial partridges whirred down the hillside over our heads and disappeared far below. The hamlet from which we had started about twenty-five hours before soon appeared not far off, and we were thankful indeed to tumble into the smoky warmth of the guide's cottage, where I lay down straight away to sleep—and I slept the sleep of the just.

In the course of the day I wandered along the Amul road to a remarkable natural Spa, called Ab-i-garm (which being interpreted means "hot water"), on the lower slopes of Damavand and above the Lar valley, which here makes its way through the great mountain barrier to the Caspian Sea. This resort is not much frequented by European cure-seekers, but it is well patronized locally, and the arrangements for accommodating and feeding visitors were excellent. I spent the night here in the hope that the baths would cure my lacerated legs, and I need not say more than that, on my return to Gulhak, they needed the more skilful attention of Dr Nelligan, the Legation medico, for a considerable period before I was fit enough to undertake the long journey back to Mesopotamia. The Ab-i-garm baths were chiefly remarkable for the fact that both hot (very hot) and cold (icy) water was laid on. Each *hammam* consisted of a roughly-constructed masonry pool veiled from the public gaze by a stone wall and roofed over. Into each led two channels quite close together, one cold and the other hot. Thus the bather could regulate the heat of his bath at will simply by blocking one channel or the other, the water so barred proceeding through another outlet to the baths lower down and ultimately back into the main stream. It was a charming spot for my *ultima thule*, and after a full day there I engaged mules and their owners—a rough but merry crew—to carry me back to Ask and thence through the mountains on the right bank of Lar to Gulhak.

With the ascent of Damavand to my credit I was able a few months later, when I stood on the shores of the Dead Sea, to

A Persian Holiday

claim a difference of about 20,000 feet between the lowest and highest spots I have trod on the earth's surface. Many others can claim as much, but I doubt if anybody but a mountaineer can claim much more—and I am certainly not a mountaineer. I was by now beginning to think that it was time to return to Baghdad. Meanwhile, Teheran and Gulhak became more and more interesting as I extended my social contacts. Bridge, of a somewhat ferocious and sometimes noisy kind, was the principal form of relaxation—if it could be called that. At the bridge table one met all sorts and conditions of people and the contacts so made were developed by dinner parties as a preliminary to more bridge into the early hours. It was, in fact, a typical "hill-station" life, in which the more fortunate had certain hours, unsuitable for bridge according to civilized standards, prescribed for the work by which they earned a living or made a name, while the unemployed like myself could scarcely complain if we had to spend some hours of idleness in such pleasant surroundings. If I had to pick out an individual, among the European community, as outstanding in a galaxy of talent, I think it would be W. A. Smart, who has now for many years been Oriental Secretary at the Cairo Residency (now Embassy). Some English people, and those mainly of the official classes, in the East go about as if there is always an exceedingly bad smell immediately under their noses. They tilt those offended members so high as to create the unintended impression that they are unduly impressed by the importance of their own existence. Well, Smart was not of that kind. He was a *bon viveur*, an exceptionally good linguist (both in Persian, which was his first love, and in Arabic, the bride of his maturer years), and a man of exceptional charm and penetration. If others had caught crabs amid the shoals of oriental politics, he saw no reason for desisting from his search for a good red herring. He went out boldly into the deeper water, but he was a good and experienced swimmer. Both in Persia and in Egypt he has had some difficult situations to tackle, and the fact that he has spent thirty years in two jobs, with only a brief interregnum at Damascus, is the measure of his success. People fall in love with Persia as they do with

A Persian Holiday

Arabia, and the undiscerning general public cannot understand such passions, but another victim of them, another long-timer, was the British Consul, Havard, another contemporary of mine at the feet of "Johnny" Browne. He was also a proficient Persicist, but of solidier mould than Smart, whom he eventually succeeded as Oriental Secretary and like whom he eventually deserted Persia for Arab lands. I cannot mention him without a reference to his charming wife whose deafness did not prevent her from being the life and soul of a society in which she exercised an easy sway. They were both great bridge and poker players.

Smart and Havard were the hub of the British machine. There was little going on in the capital or its environs, of which one or other of them had not some knowledge, which was of the utmost importance to the man at the wheel. This was Mr Norman, who had the misfortune to get into that saddle, as it were, in midstream, and it was no secret that he was finding the crossing extremely uncomfortable. The flood had caught him as he struggled gamely, but vainly, to safety under instructions screamed at him from the bank by Lord Curzon. Some of his querulous ejaculations in response to such instructions were both witty and to the point, but they were powerless to save a drowning man, and Norman, defeated by inexorable circumstances and blamed for his failure to implement an impracticable policy, ultimately resigned with considerable dignity. A devout Roman Catholic and, surely, the most elegant of all the incumbents of the Teheran billet, he was probably more suited by taste and temperament for an European diplomatic post, than for the rough and tumble of intrigue in an atmosphere of Persian *apparatus*. I certainly had a strong feeling of fellow sympathy with him in circumstances not unlike those that had driven me out of Eden. And we had many opportunities during these days at Gulhak of exchanging notes about affairs in Baghdad and Persia. As I had known during the past few months, he knew that the game was going against him, but he played on imperturbably to the end. And he was, unwillingly enough, the last British Minister to attempt to mould the destinies of Persia to a British pattern.

A Persian Holiday

To help him in the normal oiling and upkeep of the machine, he had a small crew of able younger diplomats *de carrière*—Bateman, Malet and others, for whose kindness and hospitality I had reason to be grateful. Mr Norman, I should add, was not only elegant in dress and in manner, but kept the table of a first-class Sybarite. Never elsewhere in the East have I encountered a cuisine so superb—it could scarcely, indeed, have been improved upon in Paris by the fellow-citizens of Mr Norman's *chef*. And, as for the wines, I doubt if such a cellar has ever been seen in eastern climes.

Outside the Legation, but in close contact with it, in these days was another British organization from which much was hoped for and perhaps much would have resulted to the advantage of Persia had it not been for the inevitable suspicion that it was but a link in the chain of British imperialism. This was the Financial Advisory Commission presided over by Mr (afterwards Sir Sydney) Armitage Smith. With him were several experts on various branches of financial administration, but a great part of the inevitable liaison work with the Persian authorities fell on the broad and humorous shoulders of Colonel W. G. Grey, who was formerly our Political Agent at Kuwait. He was outstanding on account of his distinguished linguistic ability, and I need only add that he was by no means the least distinguished of the bridge players of Teheran at this period.

Of the non-British elements engaged in helping Persia to get on to its feet I shall only single out for mention a single individual—the massive and sometimes rather alarming Swedish Director-General of Gendarmerie, at this time a mixed international force, engaged in multifarious activities in many parts of a still turbulent and unruly land. He was a regular *habitué* of the bridge table—a splendid, forcing player, who took risks that an ordinary man might well shrink from with the imperturbable calm of the born gambler, accustomed no less in work than in play to take his life in both hands—an offering to Fortune. He had a fist like a leg of mutton and other limbs in proportion with a close-shaven bullet head of prodigious dimensions. His ferocious mien and manner served only to disguise a guileless soul, which sometimes showed itself in

A Persian Holiday

moments of the greatest provocation, as when a partner dared to take him out of a cast-iron winning suit and let him down! I can never think of Teheran without wondering how he fared after those days.

Meanwhile, time sped all too pleasantly and there seemed no adequate reason for the prolongation of my holiday. I returned accordingly to the Hotel de France for a couple of days, during which I packed my traps and made arrangements for departure. The early part of my journey I varied by fetching a circuit via Qum and Sultanabad to Hamadan, whence I followed the route by which I had come. I thus had an opportunity of seeing the Shah 'Abdul 'Adhim mosque at closer quarters—a veritable study in gold. Qum, at the edge of its great salt desert—a forbidding-looking tract—was a study in blue, a lovely spot in spite of its decrepit, crowded, old-fashioned bazaar, in which I spent some time procuring food and purchasing specimens of its brilliant blue pottery. From there we cut into the hills for Sultanabad, a considerable town of almost European appearance with its orderly streets and villa-like houses. In one of the latter I found Madame Sevia and her charming elder daughter, refugees from the Mesopotamian rebellion, but now contemplating a return to Baghdad. Their arrangements for doing so were, indeed, so nearly complete that I readily agreed to tarry a day or two in order to have the pleasure of their company on the road. There was no tarrying by the way. Single nights were spent at Hamadan and Kirmanshah with friends of the Sevians, and on the third day we drove into Baghdad, some three months after I had left it for my holiday in Persia.

DATE OF ISSUE

This book must be returned within 3, 7, 14 days of its issue. A fine of ONE ANNA per day will be charged if the book is overdue.

--	--	--	--	--

